

# Genesis

## Chapter 37



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### **Jewish Study Bible Introduction:**

Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery. Chapter 37 begins the story of Joseph, a figure who dominates most of the remaining narrative in Genesis. In structure, the Joseph story is quite different from the preceding material centering on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Whereas the latter takes the form, predominantly, of small, self-contained passages, the story of Joseph resembles a coherent story with a subtle and well-crafted plot. Its theology too is different. Whereas the patriarchal narrative is replete with appearances of God or His messengers, and oracles from them, Joseph never sees or hears God or His messengers (the only direct revelation in these chapters comes to Jacob, in 46:1-4). Rather, God works here in a hidden way, secretly guiding the course of human events, even bringing good out of human evil (50:20). Lastly, whereas the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob take place in Canaan and Mesopotamia, the story of Joseph and his brothers takes place mostly in Egypt. The events that result in the return to the Promised Land will begin only after Joseph's death. Many of these special characteristics of the Joseph story are found in wisdom literature.<sup>1</sup>

**McGee:** As we resume the story of the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we come to the fourth outstanding figure in this last section of Genesis. From here, all the way through the Book of Genesis, the central figure is Joseph, although we are still dealing with the family of Jacob. More chapters are devoted to Joseph than to Abraham or Isaac or to anyone else. More chapters are devoted to Joseph than to the first whole period from Genesis 1–11. This should cause the thoughtful student to pause and ask why Joseph should be given such prominence in Scripture.

There are probably several reasons. One is that the life of Joseph is a good and honorable life. He is the living example of the verse: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8). God wants us to have whatever is good, virtuous, and great before us, and Joseph's life is just that.

There is a second reason, and it is a great one. There is no one in Scripture who is more like Christ in his person and experiences than Joseph. Yet nowhere in the New Testament is Joseph given to us as a type of Christ. However, the parallel cannot be accidental. As we go on into his story, we shall mention many of these parallels. There are at least thirty which I shall list later.

So now we resume the story of the line of Jacob which is that line leading to the Messiah, the Christ. Jacob is living in Canaan as the story of Joseph begins.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>2</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:147). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Torah Class:** With the outset of Chapter 37, Joseph, 2<sup>nd</sup> to the last of Jacob's sons, is 17 years old. He is living in Canaan, along with the rest of his brothers. Soon, he is going to wind up in Egypt. Here might be a good time to mention something that a good calculator and a little research bring to light. Recall that at the end of chapter 35 is recorded the death of Jacob's father, Isaac. And, I told you then that Isaac had actually lived long enough to meet all of his grandchildren, the 12 tribes of Israel. Well, Isaac also remained alive long enough to know of Joseph's disappearance, but didn't live long enough to learn the outcome.

As is not unusual in the Scriptures (which is not designed, by the way to be a novel), sometimes a statement will just kind of be laid out there, and we'll assume that that statement necessarily is attached to the verses just before it. In fact, that's often not the case.

In Genesis 35:27 we read of Jacob returning to Hebron and greeting Isaac. And, in the next verse we read that Isaac died at the age of 180, and that his sons Esau and Jacob attended to his funeral. Well, as it turns out, verses 27 and 28 are not connected; they are simply two different statements of fact, one following the other....Jacob came home, and sometime later, Isaac died. With a little basic math, we find out that Isaac died after Joseph had gone missing for 12 years. I'm not going to go through the calculations, but if you're interested, here are the two key ingredients: Jacob was 60 years younger than Isaac. So, when Isaac died at 180, Jacob had to have been 120 years old. The second thing to know is that Jacob died at 147 years old. I'll let you figure out how arrive at the proper time line, because all the info necessary is in the next several pages.

Last week we just barely got started into Genesis 37. Before we did that, though, we looked in some depth at the genealogy of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, in chapter 36. And, we learned that Esau's descendants intermarried to a large degree with Ishmael's descendants, meaning that most of the people's of the Middle East, today, have some mixture of Ishmael's and Esau's blood in their veins. While it may be difficult for us to look through scientific and rational eyes and say that it is an almost natural outcome that the descendants of the two dispossessed sons of the Patriarchs, Ishmael and Esau, would be in constant opposition to the descendants of the chosen and blessed sons of the Patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, the fact is that is exactly what has occurred. Those modern day descendants of Ishmael and Esau carry a hatred for the modern day people of Jacob (Israel) that is both historical AND spiritual in origin.

**NAS Genesis 27:38** *And Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So Esau lifted his voice and wept. 39 Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, "Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, And away from the dew of heaven from above. 40 "And by your sword you shall live, And your brother you shall serve; But it shall come about when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck."*

Notice that last verse..... "but it shall come about (Esau) when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck". This is what is going on in front of our eyes, displayed day after day, on our TVs. Esau, the Palestinians, is restless; they don't want to be under Israel's yoke....which is how they see themselves. And, they are in process of breaking that yoke from their necks and having their own sovereign nation.

And, they will succeed....for a time. But, as I've told you in past lessons, all we see happening in the Middle East today, is a result of God's division, election and separation between Isaac and Ishmael, and then between Esau and Jacob; and it is also the result of these prophetic blessings that happened 3500 years ago and more. And, no amount of peace overtures and UN councils, and treaties, and resolutions, is going to bring this to a happy ending. See.....God's plan is not that He'll give men a chance to work it out and if we can't, THEN He'll intervene (although, in fact, that IS the theology of some thoroughly confused denominations). This will ONLY be worked out WHEN God intervenes.

A few days ago, someone said to me that if it is true that all that is happening in the Middle East MUST happen, and that the only hope for peace is not manmade but rests entirely in the return of our Messiah, why should we take sides with Israel and against the Palestinians or the Muslims, or Iran, or whoever is trying to destroy Israel? Why should we even pay much attention at all as to what is going on, other than out of curiosity, because it is all destined to happen, anyway? Well, that person had a good point. Jesus Himself said that the end would not come, and He would not return, until all the things that must happen, DOES happen. So, what is our role in all this, as followers of Yeshua?

In a way, this is a time of testing for us. God DOES choose sides, because He makes the divisions that CREATE sides; and He demands that all mankind choose one side or the other. Are we for Yeshua or against Him is where the first and most important choice lays. As Believers, we are called to trust God and His word. But, our choosing doesn't end with Yeshua. The next most important spiritual choice for us is where we stand on Israel, and His people the Jews. Yehoveh made it clear that those who bless Israel (the land and the people) will be blessed, and those who curse Israel will be cursed. God does not tolerate neutrality. Christ says in Revelation "I would rather you were hot or cold, but you are tepid so I spit you out of My mouth". All one has to do is read the Holy Scriptures to know what choice is expected of us. Yet, just as Moses commanded Israel "not to hate Esau your kinsmen", we're not to hate those who side against Israel. We don't have to hate the Muslims and the Palestinian people in order to side with Israel.

Well, as the era of the Patriarchs comes to a close, Chapter 37 presents us with Joseph, the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob; and Joseph picks up where the Patriarchs left off. Joseph will be the focus of the remainder of Genesis.<sup>3</sup>

## **Genesis 37:1**

**And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.**

In dramatic contrast with the expanding, powerful Esau, reviewed in the previous session, Jacob was dwelling in the land of the sojournings of his father, the land of Canaan. Unlike Esau, Jacob had no "chiefs" or kings (35:11) yet, no lands to govern, and no full tribes. He was a sojourner. Delitzsch remarks that secular, worldly greatness comes swifter than spiritual greatness. A promised spiritual blessing demands patience and faith. Waiting while others prosper is a test of one's faithfulness and perseverance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

**[Jacob]** Completing the history of Isaac and Esau in Genesis 35:27-36:43, Moses continues the history of Jacob and his family which was dropped in Genesis 35:27-29.

**[land of Canaan]** The land of the sojournings of his forefathers (Hebrews 11:9-16).

**Hebrews 11:9-16 (KJV)** *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: [10] For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. [11] Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. [12] Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. [13] These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. [14] For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. [15] And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. [16] But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

**Torah Class:** The first verse tells us something important: the destiny that Isaac had given to his twin sons in the Blessing, was unfolding. Jacob now lived in the Promised Land, and Esau has left it, living AWAY from fertile ground, and away from regular rainfall. But, another part of a prophetic blessing from a time earlier than Jacob, even earlier than his father Isaac, is near to coming to pass; the Abrahamic blessing that, for a time the Hebrews would live as strangers in a foreign land, and be oppressed. **NAS Genesis 15:13** *And God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions.*

Soon, we'll find out that the "land that is not theirs", the place they will live in for 400 years, is Egypt. And, in Chapter 37, we're but a few years away until that event becomes a bitter reality.<sup>5</sup>

**Ramban:** "and Jacob dwelt in the land of his fathers." The meaning of the verse is that since Scripture had said that the chiefs of Esau dwelt in the land of their possessions – that is to say, the land which they took to themselves as a possession forever – it now says that Jacob, however, dwelt as his father had, as a stranger in a land which was not their own but which belonged to the Canaanites. The purport is to relate that they elected to dwell in the chosen Land, and that God's words to Abraham, that thy seed shall be a

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<sup>4</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>5</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

stranger in a land that is not theirs, where fulfilled in them but not in Esau, for Jacob alone shall be called their progeny.<sup>6</sup>

### **Genesis 37:2**

**These *are* the generations of Jacob. Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.**

**[generations of Jacob]** The history of what befell him and his posterity, not a regular genealogy.

**These are the generations** *toledoth* the history of the lives and actions of Jacob and his sons; for in this general sense the original must be taken, as in the whole of the ensuing history there is no particular account of any genealogical succession. Yet the words may be understood as referring to the tables or genealogical lists in the preceding chapter; and if so, the original must be understood in its common acceptance.<sup>7</sup>

**[Joseph]** The story of Joseph begins and Jacob's is interrupted, to be resumed in Genesis 46.

**[seventeen years old]** Jacob was now 107 years old, having been back in Canaan 10 years. Reuben, the oldest, was around 29; Benjamin, the youngest, was perhaps 7 or 8. Those who sold Joseph were from 18 to 29—the age to be more thoughtless, reckless and jealous than in the more mature years.

**The lad was with the sons of Bilhah**—It is supposed that our word lad comes from the Hebrew *yeled*, a child, a son; and that lass is a contraction of ladess, the female of lad, a girl, a young woman. Some have supposed that King James desired the translators to insert this word; but this must be a mistake, as the word occurs in this place in Edmund Beke's Bible, printed in 1549; and still earlier in that of Coverdale, printed in 1535.

**[wives]** Concubines (Genesis 35:22).

**Genesis 35:22 (KJV)** *And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:*

**[evil report]** Report of their evil doings.

**Brought unto his father their evil report**—Conjecture has been busily employed to find out what this evil report might be; but it is needless to inquire what it was, as on this head the sacred text is perfectly silent. All the use we can make of this information is, that it

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<sup>6</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>7</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

was one cause of increasing his brothers' hatred to him, which was first excited by his father's partiality, and secondly by his own dreams.<sup>8</sup>

The events of this chapter took place some years prior to Isaac's death, while Jacob and his family were living near Hebron (35:27; cf. 37:14).

We can see that the bunch of boys Jacob had were real problem children (with the exception of Joseph and Benjamin). It took these men a long time to learn the lessons God would teach them. Notice now that the emphasis shifts from Jacob to Joseph. Joseph was only seventeen, just a teenager, when this incident took place. He was the youngest of the boys out there with the flocks. Benjamin was still too young, you see, and was still at home. Joseph brought to his father a bad report about the other boys. Of course, they didn't like that. I'm sure they called him a tattletale.<sup>9</sup>

**Torah Class:** In verse 2, we're told that 17-year-old Joseph brings back a bad report about certain of his brothers and gives it to his father; in other words, he tattled on them. Anybody here have a younger brother or sister that just couldn't wait to find SOMETHING to run and tell mom and dad about, on you? Well that's the situation here. Notice something else: these particular brothers who were tattled on, were not the sons of Jacob's legal wives Leah and Rachel; they were the sons of Jacob's two concubines, Bilah and Zilpah. That could not have helped but cause additional stress and strain on the relationships between all the sons of Jacob, who were born by 4 different women. Imagine the problems in this family.

But, there is also a subtle change in family status that shows up in the Hebrew: because, for the FIRST time, Bilah and Zilpah.....Jacob's concubines.....are now called ish'ishah....which is a term usually only applied to a LEGAL wife. Now, I can't say it with 100% assurance, but unless this is a redaction or an anomaly, it appears that Jacob has made Bilah and Zilpah full wives. The Rambam, Maimonides, says that at the time of this story of Joseph, both Leah and Rachel were deceased. If this is correct.....and it is more probable than not that it is.....then we understand WHY Jacob would have elevated the status of Bilah and Zilpah; and we also understand all the more the terrible turmoil that existed within Jacob's family at this time.<sup>10</sup>

**Ramban:** "These are the *"toldoth"* (generations) of Jacob." The correct interpretation in my opinion is as follows: "These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph and his brothers, whom Scripture will mention further on." Scripture here adopts a concise approach to their names since it already mentioned them above, But the intent of the verse is to say that these are the generations of Joseph and his brothers to whom the following happened. It is also possible that the word *Eileh* (these are) alludes to all those mentioned in this book: Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons. Just as in the chapter, there are the generations of Esau, Scripture mentioned sons and sons' sons, kings and chiefs, including all that there had been among them up to

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>9</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:148). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>10</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

the time of Torah was given, so will Scripture count the generations of Jacob, his sons and grandsons, and all his seed mentioning only the outstanding details in their generations.<sup>11</sup>

**Chrysostom:** “Joseph was 17” “Youth no obstacle to virtue”

Why does he also indicate to us Joseph’s age? For you to learn that his youth constituted no obstacle to virtue and for you to have a complete awareness of the young man’s obedience to his father and his sympathy for his brothers despite their savagery. Despite his being so well disposed to them, Joseph was unable to win them over to concord with him on the grounds of his youth so as to be willing to maintain the bond of love. Instead, they saw from the outset the youth’s inclination to virtue and the father’s favor for him and were prompted to envy him. You see, “they brought false reports about Joseph to their father Israel,” (*Homelies on Genesis 61:2*)<sup>12</sup>

**Jasher: 41:1** And at the revolution of the year the sons of Jacob journeyed from Shechem, and they came to Hebron, to their father Isaac, and they dwelt there, but their flocks and herds they fed daily in Shechem, for there was there in those days good and fat pasture, and Jacob and his sons and all their household dwelt in the valley of Hebron. 2 And it was in those days, in that year, being the hundred and sixth year of the life of Jacob, in the tenth year of Jacob's coming from Padan-aram, that Leah the wife of Jacob died; she was fifty-one years old when she died in Hebron. 3 And Jacob and his sons buried her in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which is in Hebron, which Abraham had bought from the children of Heth, for the possession of a burial place. 4 And the sons of Jacob dwelt with their father in the valley of Hebron, and all the inhabitants of the land knew their strength and their fame went throughout the land. 5 And Joseph the son of Jacob, and his brother Benjamin, the sons of Rachel, the wife of Jacob, were yet young in those days, and did not go out with their brethren during their battles in all the cities of the Amorites. 6 And when Joseph saw the strength of his brethren, and their greatness, he praised them and extolled them, but he ranked himself greater than them, and extolled himself above them; and Jacob, his father, also loved him more than any of his sons, for he was a son of his old age, and through his love toward him, he made him a coat of many colors. 7 And when Joseph saw that his father loved him more than his brethren, he continued to exalt himself above his brethren, and he brought unto his father evil reports concerning them. 8 And the sons of Jacob seeing the whole of Joseph's conduct toward them, and that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him all the days. 9 And Joseph was seventeen years old, and he was still magnifying himself above his brethren, and thought of raising himself above them.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>12</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>13</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

### **Genesis 37:3**

**Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he *was* the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of *many* colours.**

Joseph is with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah: oversight or superintendence is evidently implied. This post of chief shepherd might be assigned him either from his being the son of a principal wife or as a “faithful steward” in reporting the scandalous conduct of his brethren.

“Coat of many colours”: probably a multicolored royal tunic, with long, flowing sleeves, which set him out from the group as the favored one; formed in those early days by sewing together patches of colored cloth, and considered a dress of distinction (Jug 5:30; 2 Sam 13:18). [Another possible translation could be the “coat with sleeves,” a long-sleeved robe.]. The natural inference was that Jacob had chosen Joseph to be the one through whom the divine blessings would flow. (*Jesus also possessed a distinctive robe*: Ps 22:18; Mt 2:35; Jn 19:24) [You should begin a list of similarities between the narratives of Joseph and Christ. Arthur W. Pink lists over 100.]<sup>14</sup>

**[because he was the son of his old age]** Jacob was about ninety-one when Joseph was born. He wasn't a son of his old age any more than some of the others. Benjamin was born about nine years after Joseph. This phrase must refer to a son especially devoted to the care of Jacob in his old age. After Rachel's death, Joseph may have been his father's special helper (Genesis 37:2,13-14).

**[coat of many colors]** A mark of honor and rank, worn only by the chief and heir. Joseph inherited the birthright (1 Chron. 5:1-2). The garment was of many colors, not pieces, marking it as priestly and royal (cp. Exodus 28:4; Exodus 39:1; 2 Samuel 13:18-19; Psalm 45:14). Some think this refers to broad stripes of different colored cloth (Genesis 37:3,23,32; cp. Judges 5:30; 2 Samuel 13:18). It could also refer to beautiful needle work of colored threads.<sup>15</sup>

**A coat of many colors** *kethoneth passim*, a coat made up of stripes of differently colored cloth. Similar to this was the toga *praetexta* of the Roman youth, which was white, striped or fringed with purple; this they wore till they were seventeen years of age, when they changed it for the toga *virilis* or toga *pura*, which was all white. Such vestures as clothing of distinction are worn all over Persia, India, and China to the present day. It is no wonder that his brethren should envy him, when his father had thus made him such a distinguished object of his partial love. We have already seen some of the evils produced by this unwarrantable conduct of parents in preferring one child to all the rest. The old fable of the ape and her favorite cub, which she hugged to death through kindness, was directed against such foolish parental fondnesses as these.<sup>16</sup>

In Joseph's day, everyone had a robe or cloak. Robes were used to warm oneself, to bundle up belongings for a trip, to wrap babies, to sit on, or even to serve as security for a

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<sup>14</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>15</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>16</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

loan. Most robes were knee length, short sleeved, and plain. In contrast, Joseph's robe was probably of the kind worn by royalty—long sleeved, ankle length, and colorful. The robe became a symbol of Jacob's favoritism toward Joseph, and it aggravated the already strained relations between Joseph and his brothers. Favoritism in families may be unavoidable, but its divisive effects should be minimized. Parents may not be able to change their feelings toward a favorite child, but they can change their actions toward the others.<sup>17</sup>

The order of presentation is could not say "Shalom to him,"<sup>18</sup>

The love of Jacob for his son Joseph caused his other sons to despise Joseph (v. 4). Such partiality, jealousy, and injustice are seedbeds for strife among the children and are the likely result of polygamy, as they are also of today's "blended" families resulting from divorce and remarriage

**McGee:** Jacob should have learned a lesson in his own home. He knew that to play favorites would cause trouble in a family. His own father had favored the elder brother, and Jacob knew what it was to be discriminated against. But here he practices the very same thing. We can understand his feelings, knowing that Rachel was the wife whom he really love—she was the one fine thing in his life—and Joseph is really a fine boy, and Jacob loves him dearly. While all this is true, it still is not an excuse. He should not have made him that coat of many colors.

Another possible translation of "coat of many colours" would be the "coat with sleeves," a long-sleeved robe. You see, the ordinary robe in those days consisted of one piece of cloth about ten feet long. They would put a hole in the middle of it and stick the head through this hole. Half of the cloth would drop down the front of the body and half the cloth down the back of the body. They would tie it together around the waist or seam up the sides, and that would be their coat. They didn't have sleeves. So to put sleeves in the coat of any person would set him off from the others. And certainly a coat of many colors would set him apart, also.<sup>19</sup>

**Ramban:** "Because he was the son of his old age." The verse states that Jacob loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age, whereas all his children were born to him during his old age! Issachar and Zebulun were not more than a year or two older than Joseph.

The correct interpretation appears to me to be that it was the custom of the elders to take one of their younger sons to be with them to attend them. He would constantly lean on his arm, never being separated from him, and he would be called ben z'kunav because he attended him in his old age. Now Jacob took Joseph for this purpose, and he was with him constantly. He therefore did not accompany the flock when they went to pasture in distant places.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>19</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:148). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>20</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

**Ambrose:** “Joseph lost the love of his brothers”

And so we are taught the proper nature of parental love and filial gratitude. It is pleasant to love one’s children and very pleasant to love them exceedingly, but often even parental love does harm to the children unless it is practiced with restraint; for it may give the beloved child free rein out of excessive indulgence or, by preference shown to one child, may alienate the others from the spirit of brotherly love. That son gains more who gains the love of his brothers. This is a more splendid manifestation of generosity on the part of the parents and a richer inheritance for the sons. Let the children be joined in a like favor, who have joined in a like nature...

What wonder if quarrels arise among brothers over an estate or a house, when enmity blazed up among the sons of holy Jacob over a tunic? What then? Should we find fault with Jacob because he preferred the one son to the others? But we cannot take from parents their freedom to love the more those children, whom they believe to be the more deserving, not ought we to cut off the sons from their eager desire to be the more pleasing. To be sure, Jacob loved the more that son in whom he foresaw the greater marks of virtue; thus he would not appear to have shown preference so much as father to son but rather as prophet to a sacred sign. And Jacob was right to make for his son a tunic of many colors, to indicate by it that Joseph was to be preferred to his brothers with his clothing of manifold virtues. (*On Joseph 2:5-6*)<sup>21</sup>

### **Genesis 37:4**

**And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.**

**[saw that their father loved him more]** It was unwise of Jacob to show favoritism. This may have been one reason these brothers had such little respect for their father (Genesis 37:31-34). Children see it when a parent shows favoritism; it always causes trouble in the family, as here (Genesis 37:4-11,18-34), and in the case of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 25:28; Genesis 27:1-13,35-38,41-46). See James 2:1-10.<sup>22</sup>

**[hated him]** His position, dreams, character, etc.

**McGee:** Naturally, the brothers hated him for being the favorite of his father. They couldn’t even speak peaceably to him. So here we see strife in this family also. I tell you, I don’t care whose family it is, sin will ruin it. Sin ruins lives, and sin ruins families; sin ruins communities, and it ruins nations. This is the problem with our families and cities and nations today. There is just one cause: God calls it *sin*.

So here we find that this boy Joseph is the object of discrimination. His father discriminates in his love for him. The brothers discriminate in their hatred against him.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>22</sup> Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

<sup>23</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:148). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**could not speak peaceably unto him**—did not say “peace be to thee” [Ge 43:23, &c.], the usual expression of good wishes among friends and acquaintances. It is deemed a sacred duty to give all this form of salutation; and the withholding of it is an unmistakable sign of dislike or secret hostility. The habitual refusal of Joseph’s brethren, therefore, to meet him with “the *salaam*,” showed how ill-disposed they were towards him. It is very natural in parents to love the youngest, and feel partial to those who excel in talents or amiableness. But in a family constituted as Jacob’s—many children by different mothers—he showed great and criminal indiscretion.<sup>24</sup>

**Torah Class:** Now, because Jacob had always favored Rachel, he also favored the 2 children she gave him: Joseph and Benjamin; and especially Joseph. We are told in V3 that Jacob loved Joseph more, and apparently made no bones about making that fact very clear. And, he further signified Joseph’s favor by giving him what most Bibles will say is a “coat of many colors”. Actually, it was not a coat at all, but a tunic. In Hebrew, *k’tonet passim*.

But, there are many types of tunics, ranging from the ordinary to special. Even more, there was a tunic that went from neck to ankle, and all the way to the wrists on the arms. This was a royal tunic and the form of the Hebrew used here says that, indeed, this was a royal robe. Imagine, now. This wasn’t that Joseph got a nicer coat than his brothers. It was that his father virtually anointed him as a prince, and had him prancing around amongst his brothers in that kingly garb. The jealousy and envy this was bound to cause was going to wind up nearly costing Joseph his life. In fact, the envy grew into hatred of Joseph to the point, as it says in V4, that his brothers could not speak to him in friendly or civil terms. Jacob’s actions in his almost obsessive preference of Joseph made Joseph not fit in with his brothers. Literally, the translation is “they could not get themselves to address him unto peace”. Much like it is in the Middle East today, back in that time, the common greeting was “peace be with you”. What this verse is saying, is that these brothers couldn’t even bring themselves to even offer Joseph the standard “peace be with you” greeting, because they loathed him so much. It’s within this context that we must view what is about to transpire.

Somehow Joseph was at least somewhat aloof to all this rage and hatred that surrounded him. And, in youthful naivety, Joseph didn’t have the good sense to keep his mouth shut on an occasion in which he had a dream the meaning of which was exciting to him, but most certainly NOT to his brothers.<sup>25</sup>

**Chrysostom:** “Envy Damages the Soul”

Envy is a terrible passion, you see, and when it affects the soul, it does not leave it before bringing it to an extremely sorry state. [It damages] the soul that gives it birth and affect [s] the object of its envy in the opposite way to that intended, rendering him more conspicuous, more esteemed, more famous – which in turn proves another severe blow to the envious person. Notice at any rate in this instance how this remarkable man is depicted as ignorant of what was going on and conversing cheerfully in great simplicity

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<sup>24</sup> Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ge 37:4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>25</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

with them as his brothers who had caused the same birth pangs as he... They for their part were in the grip of the passion of envy and were thus brought to hate him. (*Homilies on Genesis 61:4.*)<sup>26</sup>

**Caesarius of Arles:** “The disease of envy”

It is written concerning blessed Joseph, dearly beloved, that his brothers envied him and therefore “could not even greet him.” It is true, beloved brothers, that so dangerous is the disease of envy that it cannot even spare brothers, not to mention strangers. Indeed, at the very beginning of the world Cain, a wicked brother, killed the just Abel through envy. Holy and faithful Joseph then was shown to be a more just servant of the Lord because of his tribulations. Through envy he was first sold by his brothers to the Ishmaelites as a slave, and after having been sold by the very people by whom he had seen himself worshiped, he was later handed over to an Egyptian master. (Sermon 90:1)<sup>27</sup>

### **Genesis 37:5**

**And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told *it* his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.**

**importance of dreams.** Dreams in the ancient world were thought to offer information from the divine realm and were therefore taken very seriously. Some dreams, given to prophets and kings, were considered a means of divine revelation. Most dreams, however, even the ordinary dreams of common people, were believed to contain omens that communicated information about what the gods were doing. Those that were revelation usually identified the deity and often involved the deity. The dreams that were omens usually made no reference to deity. Dreams were often filled with symbolism necessitating an interpreter, though at times the symbols were reasonably self-evident. The information that came through dreams was not believed to be irreversible. Dreams of a rise to power like the ones Joseph had are known in the ancient Near East, notably one concerning Sargon, king of Akkad, half a millennium earlier than Joseph.<sup>28</sup>

Like the “bad reports [that] he brought to his father” (v.2), his telling his brothers the dream evidences Joseph’s immaturity and lack of foresight – both of which will be dramatically remedied as his tale unfolds.<sup>29</sup>

### **Genesis 37:6**

**And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:**

This seems to signify that Jacob favored him above the rest with the intent of granting him all or a larger portion of the inheritance. Yet Jacob should have remembered what parental favoritism does to a family. It had separated him from his loving mother (27:1-

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<sup>26</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>27</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>28</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>29</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

28:5), and it would separate Joseph from Jacob. God used dreams when His people were leaving or outside the land, that is, in the lands of pagans: God had announced to Abraham in a dream the Egyptian bondage in the first place (15:13); God promised protection and prosperity for Jacob in his sojourn with Laban (28:12, 15); and, by two dreams God predicted that Joseph would rule over his family.

**McGee:** How can we explain his conduct here? Why would he go to his father and tattle on his brothers in the first place when he knew it would incur their hatred? Well, I think he just didn't know how bad this world can be. He had no idea how bad his brothers were. I'm of the opinion that he was a rather gullible boy at this time. It took him a long time to find out about the ways of the world, but he certainly did learn. Eventually he probably knew as much about the world and the wickedness of man to man as anyone. But that was later on, not now.

You can just imagine how Joseph has been protected. His father centered all of his affection on Rachel. He had fallen in love with her at first sight and had worked fourteen years for her. Then many years went by before she bore him a child. Finally Joseph was born. What a delight that must have been for Jacob. But now Rachel is gone; so he centers his affection on this boy. He shouldn't have done that—he has other sons to raise—but that is what he has done. Joseph has been loved and protected.<sup>30</sup>

### **Genesis 37:7**

**For, behold, we *were* binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.**

Joseph predicted his family would become dependent upon and humbled before him in Egypt, as fulfilled in Genesis 42-50.

**We were binding sheaves in the field**—Though in these early times we read little of tillage, yet it is evident from this circumstance that it was practiced by Jacob and his sons. The whole of this dream is so very plain as to require no comment, unless we could suppose that the sheaves of grain might have some reference to the plenty in Egypt under Joseph's superintendence, and the scarcity in Canaan, which obliged the brethren to go down to Egypt for corn, where the dream was most literally fulfilled, his brethren there bowing in the most abject manner before him.<sup>31</sup>

### **Genesis 37:8**

**For, behold, we *were* binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.**

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<sup>30</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:148). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

The scene of the first dream was agricultural: This may be a hint of the manner in which Joseph's authority over his brothers would be achieved (cf. 42:1-3). His ostensible destiny wasn't missed by the envious brothers.

In each of the three pairs of dreams in the Joseph story, one dream focuses on grain or grain products (40:16-19; 41:5-7). The brothers see only dominance in Joseph's own first dream, missing altogether the symbolism of the grain imagery. When they do bow down to him it will be in supplication that he – who has grain when they do not – will feed them (42:6-7).<sup>32</sup>

**Torah Class:** In this dream, he sees these sheaves, bundles, of harvested grain of some sort. There were 12 of these sheaves, and 11 of them were bowing down to the 12th. Now, picture this teenaged Joseph, standing there in his regal tunic, all full of himself, telling this story to his 10 older brothers who knew full well this dream's symbolism: that they would, someday, all submit to Joseph as their master!

Here we see how God will communicate to Joseph (in dreams and visions), as opposed to the more direct, audible, even 2 way conversations He had with the Patriarchs. But, we also need to understand that this was not unique to Joseph. Dreams and visions were standard ways that people of that era thought their god or gods communicated with them. And, people generally believed these prophetic visions. But, it was also understood that the personality and ambitions of the dreamer also played a role in the dream; therefore, a dream was kind of a hybrid thing: it was an oracle or a prophecy that was part god and part the aspirations of the person having the dream.<sup>33</sup>

### **Genesis 37:9**

**And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.**

**[the sun and the moon and the eleven stars]** A symbol of Israel, the sun representing Jacob, the moon his wives, and the eleven stars his eleven sons (cp. 12 stars, Rev. 12:1).<sup>34</sup>

**He dreamed yet another dream**—This is as clear as the preceding. But how could Jacob say, Shall I and thy mother, etc., when Rachel his mother was dead some time before this? Perhaps Jacob might hint, by this explanation, the impossibility of such a dream being fulfilled, because one of the persons who should be a chief actor in it was already dead. But any one wife or concubine of Jacob was quite sufficient to fulfill this part of the dream. It is possible, some think, that Joseph may have had these dreams before his mother Rachel died; but were even this the case, she certainly did not live to fulfill the part which appears to refer to herself.

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<sup>32</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>33</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>34</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

**The sun and the moon and the eleven stars**—Why eleven stars? Was it merely to signify that his brothers might be represented by stars? Or does he not rather there allude to the Zodiac, his eleven brethren answering to eleven of the celestial signs, and himself to the twelfth? This is certainly not an unnatural thought, as it is very likely that the heavens were thus measured in the days of Joseph; for the zodiacal constellations have been distinguished among the eastern nations from time immemorial.<sup>35</sup>

### **Genesis 37:10**

**And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, *What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?***

**[his father rebuked him]** Partly through ignorance and partly in wisdom, to lessen the hatred of his other sons toward Joseph.

**[What is this dream that thou hast dreamed?]** Jacob rightly interpreted the dreams as referring to himself and his family being dependent upon Joseph and being humbled before him. Fulfilled as in Genesis 42-50.

**[thy mother]** Rachel was dead but Jewish custom conceded the title of mother to another who was the wife of the father—in this case Leah.

**Chumash; The Last Word:** Joseph had two dreams: one about physical matters (binding sheaves), and one about spiritual matters (the sun, moon and stars, which are heavenly bodies). Nevertheless, both dreams shared exactly the same message.

This teaches us that the Jew's physical and spiritual affairs should not be separated from each other, each having its own separate, "message." Rather, a person should align his physical and spiritual affairs to complement each other. For example, one's physical activities, such as eating and drinking, should be done for the sake of Heaven, in order to serve God properly.<sup>36</sup>

### **Genesis 37:11**

**And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.**

The scene of the second dream was celestial. The sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowed down to him. The dream, then, symbolically anticipated the elevation of Joseph over the whole house of Jacob. Jacob himself acknowledged the implied interpretation. [*This becomes especially significant in understanding the imagery employed in Revelation Chapter 12: the woman there is Israel, by Israel's own interpretation! This also is suggestive evidence that the "signs in the heavens" perceptions have some validity.*]<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>36</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>37</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

**[envied him]** Envy was added to hatred. Envy is selfish grudging of what another enjoys (Job 5:2; Proverbs 14:30; Romans 1:29; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3). It is associated with bitterness, strife, murder and other sins (Eccles. 9:6; Romans 1:29; Romans 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3; James 3:14-16; James 4:5). Joseph's dreams incited envy in his brothers but deep thought in Jacob who took them as divine indication of events that would affect his family. They also helped prepare Joseph for his coming sufferings in Egypt (Genesis 42:8-9; Genesis 45:4-8; Genesis 50:15-21).<sup>38</sup>

Joseph tells his first dream to the brothers alone, the second to his brothers and his father. Similarly, his brothers come to Egypt alone and bow down to him (42:6); only afterwards does Jacob come (46:6) and bow to his son (47:31). Jacob is doubly incredulous of the dream, perhaps because it appears to mention Rachel, who has already died giving birth to Benjamin (35:16-20). In the Talmud, a rabbi observes that this illustrates the rule that only part of any given dream comes true, not the whole (b. Ber. 55a). Rashi, on the other hand, cites a Midrash that identifies Joseph's mother with Bilhah, Rachel's slave and surrogate (Gen. Rab. 44:11). Some modern scholars have speculated that the second dream presupposes an earlier form of the story, in which Rachel had not yet passed away.<sup>39</sup>

**McGee:** He told them this dream and they understood what he was talking about. This same image appears in Revelation 12:1 where a woman is described clothed with the sun, and the moon is under her feet, and she had a crown of twelve stars upon her head. That means the nation of Israel. These brethren understood that Joseph was telling them about themselves, the sons of Israel.

We are seeing the nation of Israel at its beginning here. Genesis is like a bud, and the flower opens up as we go through the Scripture. Here is a bud that is not going to open up until we get into the Book of Revelation. It is a late bloomer, by the way, but it is going to open up there. We need to understand what is being said rather than try to make guesses. We don't need to be guessing when it is made this clear.

Old Jacob understood it exactly, and he chided, "Does this mean that your father, your mother, and your brothers are going to bow down to you?" All Joseph could answer was, "That was the dream." He didn't try to interpret it because it was evident. His brothers just dismissed it, paid no attention to it. They thought it wasn't even in the realm of possibility, as far as they were concerned. They knew that not one of them would ever bow down to Joseph! But Jacob observed the saying.<sup>40</sup>

**Torah Class:** In verse 9, he has another dream, and once again he can't wait to tell everybody. The first dream he only told to his brothers; this dream he relates to his father, Jacob, as well. Now, he says, that the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. They again knew full well what THAT meant. But, it was even more insulting because in that era, and actually right down to pagan religions of our day, the sun

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<sup>38</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>39</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>40</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:149). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

represented the father figure, and the moon the mother, and the stars their offspring. So, Joseph was now saying that not only would his brothers bow down in subservience to him, but so would his own mother and father! Jacob tries to rein Joseph's self-importance in a bit, by mocking him and saying ".....are we to come, I and your mother.....and bow low to the ground to you?" Now his whole family must have thought Joseph was losing it and suffering from delusions of grandeur. In fact, it will turn out, these dreams were accurate; further, that dream interpretation was a spiritual gift from God for Joseph. By the way, this passage lends credence that Bilah and Zilpah had become wives for Jacob. Because, though Rachel was long dead before this incident, here we Jacob respond with "so you say I and your mother....should bow down to you". Rachel was Joseph's mother, but Bilah had been her handmaiden. Bilah would have had much to do with Joseph's upbringing. If Jacob had elevated Bilah's status to a full wife, it would have been customary in that era to refer to her as "Joseph's mother".<sup>41</sup>

**Chumash: Classic Questions:** Why did Joseph tell over his dreams to his brothers, if he knew that they hated him?

**Roah:** According to Jewish Law, a person is prohibited from withholding a prophecy that he receives (Sanhedren 89a). Therefore, Joseph was obligated to give over his prophetic dream, which described how he would rule over his brothers, despite what the consequences might be.

**Abarbanel:** The events predicted by a dream only materialize according to the way they are interpreted (Brachos 55b). Since Joseph knew that his brothers hated him, he wanted to give them the opportunity to calm their hatred by allowing them to interpret his dreams.

**Sforno:** Joseph was immature, and he made an unwise move.

**Radak:** He wanted to enrage the brothers further, because they had shown hatred for him.

**Chizkuni:** Joseph was trying to show that the brothers need not be angry at their father for showing favoritism to him, because Joseph's greatness was in fact Divinely decree, as was evident from the prophetic dream.

**Shach Al Hatorah:** Unless a dream is related to others it will not materialize (Brachos 55b). Since Joseph wanted the dream to come true, he related it to his brothers, but inevitably, this made them hate him more.

**Ohr HaChayim:** Joseph wanted to indicate to his brothers that it was unwise to hate him because one day they would need him.<sup>42</sup>

**Jasher: 41:10** At that time he dreamed a dream, and he came unto his brothers and told them his dream, and he said unto them, I dreamed a dream, and behold we were all binding sheaves in the field, and my sheaf rose and placed itself upon the ground and your sheaves surrounded it and bowed down to it. 11 And his brethren answered him and said unto him, What meaneth this dream that thou didst dream? dost thou imagine in thy heart to reign or rule over us? 12 And he still came, and told the thing to his father Jacob, and Jacob kissed Joseph when he heard these words from his mouth, and Jacob blessed Joseph. 13 And when the sons of Jacob saw that their father had blessed Joseph and had kissed him, and that he loved him exceedingly, they became jealous of him and hated him

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<sup>41</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>42</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

the more. 14 And after this Joseph dreamed another dream and related the dream to his father in the presence of his brethren, and Joseph said unto his father and brethren, Behold I have again dreamed a dream, and behold the sun and the moon and the eleven stars bowed down to me. 15 And his father heard the words of Joseph and his dream, and seeing that his brethren hated Joseph on account of this matter, Jacob therefore rebuked Joseph before his brethren on account of this thing, saying, What meaneth this dream which thou hast dreamed, and this magnifying thyself before thy brethren who are older than thou art? 16 Dost thou imagine in thy heart that I and thy mother and thy eleven brethren will come and bow down to thee, that thou speakest these things? 17 And his brethren were jealous of him on account of his words and dreams, and they continued to hate him, and Jacob reserved the dreams in his heart.<sup>43</sup>

### **Genesis 37:12**

**And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem.**

**shepherds grazing.** The lush vegetation produced by the winter rains would have allowed shepherds to remain in pastures near their villages and camps. Once the rains ended, the herds would graze in harvested fields and then would be taken into the hill country, where vegetation remained through the summer months.

At this time, Jacob and his family were living around Hebron, which was twenty or more miles south of Jerusalem. And Shechem is that far north of Jerusalem, so these boys are grazing the sheep a long ways from home. They grazed their sheep over that entire area.

### **Genesis 37:13**

**And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed *the flock* in Shechem? Come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here *am I*.**

Joseph's response, I am ready ("*hinene*"), recalls instances in which the same Heb word appears in contexts in which earlier fathers were about to lose, or seemed about to lose, their favored sons (22:1, 7, 11: 27:1).<sup>44</sup>

### **Genesis 37:14**

**And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.**

From Jacob's home in the Valley of Hebron north to Shechem was about 50 miles ( and Dothan was another 15 miles north). The vale of Shechem was, from the earliest mention of Canaan, blessed with extraordinary abundance of water. That's why they traveled from

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<sup>43</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

<sup>44</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Hebron to this place, though it must have cost them near 20 hours' travelling—that is, at the shepherd rate, a little more than 50 miles.

How your brothers are, lit. “the shalom of your brothers,” is telling, given the absence of “shalom” in the family (see v.4 n.). Shechem being quite a distance from Hebron, there is room to wonder why Jacob did not foresee danger, even before his beloved son reached his angry brothers. Eventually, Joseph does reach Shechem in peace (43:29-34).<sup>45</sup>

Joseph had traveled all the way from Hebron to Shechem. When he reached Shechem, he began to look around for them. That is rugged terrain up there, and Joseph couldn't locate them.

**Jasher 41:18** And the sons of Jacob went one day to feed their father's flock in Shechem, for they were still herdsmen in those days; and whilst the sons of Jacob were that day feeding in Shechem they delayed, and the time of gathering in the cattle was passed, and they had not arrived.

19 And Jacob saw that his sons were delayed in Shechem, and Jacob said within himself, Peradventure the people of Shechem have risen up to fight against them, therefore they have delayed coming this day. 20 And Jacob called Joseph his son and commanded him, saying, Behold thy brethren are feeding in Shechem this day, and behold they have not yet come back; go now therefore and see where they are, and bring me word back concerning the welfare of thy brethren and the welfare of the flock. 21 And Jacob sent his son Joseph to the valley of Hebron, and Joseph came for his brothers to Shechem, and could not find them, and Joseph went about the field which was near Shechem, to see where his brothers had turned, and he missed his road in the wilderness, and knew not which way he should go.<sup>46</sup>

### **Genesis 37:15**

**And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou?**

**McGee:** I can imagine that this man had seen Joseph pass his tent several times; so he asks him who he is looking for.

**Ramban:** “and a man found him, and behold, he was straying in the field.” The verse is stating that Joseph was straying from the road, not knowing where to go, and he entered a field since he was looking for them in a place of pasture. Scripture mentions this at length in order to relate that many events befell him which could properly have caused him to return, but he endured everything patiently for the honor of his father. It also informs us that the Divine decree is true and man's industry is worthless. The Holy One, blessed be He, sent him a guide without his knowledge in order to bring him into their hands. It is this that our Rabbis intended when they said that these men were angels, for

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<sup>45</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>46</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

these events did not occur without purpose, but rather to inform us that *It is the counsel of the Eternal that shall stand.*<sup>47</sup>

**Chumash;** “the man in the field” What led Rashi to conclude that, at the literal level, the “man” in the field was none other than the angel Gabriel? Why did he reject the simple interpretation [of Ibn Ezra] that it was one of the passers-by?

Rashi was troubled by the Torah’s expression, “a man found him,” which suggests that the man was actually looking for Joseph. This begs the question: Why would a passer-by be looking for Joseph?<sup>48</sup>

**Jasher 41:22** And an angel of the Lord found him wandering in the road toward the field, and Joseph said unto the angel of the Lord, I seek my brethren; hast thou not heard where they are feeding? and the angel of the Lord said unto Joseph, I saw thy brethren feeding here, and I heard them say they would go to feed in Dothan. 23 And Joseph hearkened to the voice of the angel of the Lord, and he went to his brethren in Dothan and he found them in Dothan feeding the flock.<sup>49</sup>

### **Genesis 37:16**

**And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed *their flocks*.**

### **Genesis 37:17**

**And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan.**

[**Dothan**] On the high road to Egypt, the caravan route from the east (Genesis 37:17, 28).

**Dothan.** Located at Tell Dothan, this is an imposing site covering twenty-five acres. It is situated fourteen miles north of Shechem, on the main route used by merchants and herdsmen going north to the Jezreel Valley. It developed into a major city site in the Early Bronze Age (3200-2400 B.C.) and would have served as a natural landmark for travelers. The area around the city provided choice pasture land, thus explaining the presence of Joseph’s brothers.<sup>50</sup>

Dothan is a long way north of Shechem. It is near the Valley of Esdraelon, and this is where the brothers have moved the sheep. And at last Joseph found them—there they were.

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<sup>47</sup> Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

<sup>48</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>49</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

<sup>50</sup> Bible Background Commentary

### **Genesis 37:18**

**And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.**

[saw him afar off] They most likely recognized him by his coat.

### **Genesis 37:19**

**And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.**

[dreamer] Hebrew: *ba'al* (HSN-1167) *chalomowt* (HSN-2472), master of dreams. Joseph did have dreams and the divine gift of interpretation (Genesis 37; Genesis 40-41), like Daniel (Daniel 1:17). This is a form of speech which conveys great contempt.

**Behold, this dreamer cometh**—literally, "master of dreams"—a bitterly ironical sneer. Dreams being considered suggestions from above, to make false pretensions to having received one was detested as a species of blasphemy, and in this light Joseph was regarded by his brethren as an artful pretender. They already began to form a plot for Joseph's assassination, from which he was rescued only by the address of Reuben, who suggested that he should rather be cast into one of the wells, which are, and probably were, completely dried up in summer.<sup>51</sup>

### **Genesis 37:20**

**Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.**

The brothers devised a plot to kill that dreamer in order to prevent his dreams from being fulfilled. Before, they plotted to kill many Shechemites in revenge for their sister (34:24-29); now, by contrast, they plotted to kill their own brother! Cf. 1 John 3:12-13.

**Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit ...]** Note the fourfold plot against Joseph in Genesis 37:20-21, showing to what extent his brothers hated and envied him.

[slay him] Killing is generally the next step downward from other premeditated sins.

[we shall see what will become of his dreams] This shows the dreams of Joseph had made a deep impression on them. Envy, selfishness and pride are the roots of crime.

**Come now and let us slay him**—What unprincipled savages these must have been to talk thus coolly about imbruing their hands in an innocent brother's blood! How necessary is a Divine revelation, to show man what God hates and what he loves!

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<sup>51</sup> JFB Commentary

Ferocious cruelty is the principal characteristic of the nations and tribes who receive not the law at his mouth.<sup>52</sup>

**[pit] cisterns.** Cisterns were hollowed out of the limestone bedrock or were dug and then lined with plaster to store rain water. They provided water for humans and animals through most of the dry months. When they were empty, they sometimes served as temporary cells for prisoners (see Jeremiah 38:6).

Could jealousy ever make you feel like killing someone? Before saying, “Of course not,” look at what happened in this story. Ten men were willing to kill their younger brother over a robe and a few reported dreams. Their deep jealousy had grown into ugly rage, completely blinding them to what was right. Jealousy can be difficult to recognize because our reasons for it seem to make sense. But left unchecked, jealousy grows quickly and leads to serious sins. The longer you cultivate jealous feelings, the harder it is to uproot them. The time to deal with jealousy is when you notice yourself keeping score of what others have.<sup>53</sup>

**McGee:** How they hated Joseph! Here they are probably almost one hundred miles from home, and they say to each other, “Let’s get rid of him now, and we’ll see what will become of his dreams!”

Before we go on with the story, I want to call to your attention the comparison of Joseph to the Lord Jesus. You just should not miss the analogy.

1. The *birth* of Joseph was miraculous in that it was by the intervention of God as an answer to prayer. The Lord Jesus is virgin born. His birth was certainly miraculous!
2. Joseph was *loved* by his father. The Lord Jesus was *loved* by His Father, who declared, “This is My beloved Son.”
3. Joseph had the coat of many colors which set him apart. Christ was set apart in that He was “separate from sinners.”
4. Joseph announced that he was to *rule* over his brethren. The Lord Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah. Just as they ridiculed Joseph’s message, so they also ridiculed Jesus. In fact, nailed to His cross were the words: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.
5. Joseph was *sent* by his father to his brethren. Jesus was *sent* to His brethren—He came first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
6. Joseph was *hated* by his brethren without a cause, and the Lord Jesus was *hated* by His brethren without a cause.

As we return to the story now, remember that Joseph is approaching his brothers, and they are plotting against him. He is wearing that coat of many colors or with the sleeves, which was a mark of position. We must remember that Joseph was younger than his brothers yet was in a position above them. So there is all this hatred and jealousy—to the point of murder!

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<sup>52</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>53</sup> Life Application Notes

Reuben has already lost his position as the firstborn. However, he stands in a good light here. He has more mature judgment than the others.<sup>54</sup>

**Torah Class:** Apparently the flocks of the Israelite clan were at this time pasturing in the grassy fields and valleys surrounding Shechem, while the home base was in Hebron; and Joseph's brothers were off tending the animals. I find it kind of interesting that Jacob and his sons apparently felt no compunction in going back to Shechem, considering that just a few years earlier, the King of Shechem's son had raped Jacob's daughter Dinah, and in retaliation the sons of Jacob had slaughtered every male resident of that city, and taken many of their widows and children for their own! Israel, Jacob, told Joseph to go to his brothers and check on their welfare. The reason for Jacob sending Joseph could well have been that he was concerned for his sons in light of that horrible incident. In the Middle East, the desire for vengeance can go on for generations.

Off goes Joseph, unaware of the precarious situation he was in. It was a journey of about 50 miles, and as he gets near Shechem, a man informs him that the flock had been there, but moved on to a place called Dothan. Two things: first, despite a few movie versions to the contrary, this man was only a man. The Hebrew word used was "ish".....man. So, this was not an angel. Second, the place called Dothan means "two wells".

And, Joseph was about to have a close encounter with one of those wells. The area of the two wells was hilly and lush. And, apparently from a vantage point atop one of those hills, the brothers saw Joseph coming towards them. Their hatred now overflowed, dear old dad was at least 3 days journey away, and even before Joseph reached them, they had decided to kill him. Verses 19 and 20 show us rather clearly what it was that finally put them over the edge: it was those dreams of Joseph that offended them to the point of murder. Let's be clear: this is not only about jealousy and insult. These brothers believed, to some degree, that the dreams of Joseph being their master were true. If they killed Joseph, then the problem was solved.<sup>55</sup>

### **Genesis 37:21**

**And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.**

**[Reuben heard it]** Reuben committed adultery with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). Perhaps remorse over this and regret for the silent and deep disappointment of his father made Reuben want to spare Jacob any further suffering.

**[delivered him out of their hands]** Reuben did his part. His planned to return Joseph to his father (Genesis 37:22), but he himself was deceived by the others who suspected this of him (Genesis 42:22). Reuben's weakness as the firstborn, in not rebuking his brothers and taking a firm stand to deliver Joseph, illustrates Jacob's appraisal of him in Genesis 49:4.

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<sup>54</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:150). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>55</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

**Reuben heard it**—Though Reuben appears to have been a transgressor of no ordinary magnitude, if we take Genesis 35:22 according to the letter, yet his bosom was not the habitation of cruelty. He determined, if possible, to save his brother from death, and deliver him safely to his father, with whose fondness for him he was sufficiently acquainted. Josephus, in his usual way, puts a long flourishing speech in the mouth of Reuben on the occasion, spoken in order to dissuade his brethren from their barbarous purpose; but as it is totally unfounded, it is worthy of no regard.<sup>56</sup>

They would have killed him right then and there if Reuben had not intervened.

### **Genesis 37:22**

**And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, *but* cast him into this pit that *is* in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again.**

Reuben, the first-born, was directly responsible for the lad to his father. Trying to gain an opportunity to restore Joseph to Jacob, Reuben persuaded his brothers not to commit such a crime.

It was Reuben's avowed purpose, after Joseph had been put into the pit, to slip back again and take him out of the pit and take him home to his father.

### **Genesis 37:23**

**And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, *his* coat of *many* colours that *was* on him;**

That coat Joseph wore was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. They hated it because it set him apart from them. According to the law of primogeniture, the older brothers had a prior claim; so they stripped off from Joseph the hated coat.

**[they stript Joseph out of his coat ...]**

#### **Ten Sins of Joseph's Brothers**

1. General evils (Genesis 37:2)
2. Hatred and malice (Genesis 37:4-8)
3. Envy and jealousy (Genesis 37:11)
4. Plotting to take life (Genesis 37:18-22)
5. Mockery and ridicule (Genesis 37:19)
6. Stripping Joseph of his symbol of position and rank (Genesis 37:23)
7. Casting him into a waterless pit to suffer unknown agony and death (Genesis 37:24)
8. Showing no mercy in face of his pleas (Genesis 37:25; Genesis 42:21)
9. Kidnapping and selling Joseph into slavery and unknown torture (Genesis 37:27-28)
10. Deceiving and lying to Jacob (Genesis 37:31-35)

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<sup>56</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

## **Genesis 37:24**

**And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it.**

[pit] Hebrew: *bower* (H-953), a dry cistern. There are still many pits or cisterns in Palestine. They were often hewn out of solid rock, being narrower at the mouth than at the bottom. It would be almost impossible for one to get out of such a pit unaided. Some were even used as dungeons for prisoners.

**Chumash: Classic Questions:** What was in the pit? Rashi: Since the verse states, “the pit was empty,” don’t I already know that “there was no water in it”? Why did the Torah need to write, “there was not water in it”? [The Torah is hinting that] there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.<sup>57</sup>

## **Genesis 37:25**

**And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.**

They are called Midianites (Gen 37:28), and Medanites, in *Hebrew* (Gen 37:36), being a travelling caravan composed of a mixed association of Arabians. Ishmaelites were descendants of Abraham by Hagar (16:15) and the Midianites (37:28) descended from Abraham by his concubine Keturah (25:2). The term Ishmaelites became a general designation for desert tribes, so that even Midianite traders were also known as Ishmaelites. Their approach could easily be seen on the plain of Dothan: their road, after crossing the ford from the trans-jordanic district, led along the south side of the mountains of Gilboa.<sup>58</sup>

[sat down to eat bread] Showing indifference and hardness of heart toward sin.

[Ishmaelites] Ishmaelites and Midianites (Genesis 37:25-28) were descendants of Abraham through Hagar and Keturah (Genesis 16:11-12; Genesis 25:2). Some versions read "Arabians," from *ʿarab* (HSN-6148), to mingle, indicating a vast number of clans and tribes. They traveled together for safety. A caravan had many companies, each with its own name and work that contributed to the smooth running of the whole. Camels were generally tied together four abreast, and again tied to others behind them, like teams.

There was well-organized trade between Egypt and other lands. Many drugs and spices were sold to Egypt for embalming and medicinal purposes. Egyptians depended upon Arab merchants for these supplies.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

<sup>58</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>59</sup> Dake’s Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

**They sat down to eat bread**—Every act is perfectly in character, and describes forcibly the brutish and diabolic nature of their ruthless souls.

**A company of Ishmaelites**—We may naturally suppose that this was a caravan, composed of different tribes that, for their greater safety, were traveling together, and of which Ishmaelites and Midianites made the chief. In the Chaldee they are called Arabians, which, from *arab*, to mingle, was in all probability used by the Targumist as the word Arabians is used among us, which comprehends a vast number of clans, or tribes of people. The Jerusalem Targum calls them *Sarkin*, what we term Saracens. In the Persian, the clause stands thus: *karavane iskmaaleem araban aya*. “A caravan of Ishmaelite Arabs came.” This seems to give the true sense.<sup>60</sup>

**spice trade and caravan routes.** Caravans brought incense from south Arabia to Gaza on the Palestinian coast and to Egypt, using various routes through the Sinai Peninsula. It would have been along one of these northern Sinai routes that the Midianites met Joseph’s brothers and purchased him for resale in Egypt along with the rest of their trade goods.

**Chromatius:** “The fragrance of justice”

Joseph was rejected by his brothers and was received by the Ishmaelites; in the same manner our Lord and Savior was rejected by the Jews and received by the pagans. The Ishmaelites who received Joseph carried along with them all kinds of perfumes, and this fact showed that the pagans by embracing the faith would spread the different perfumes of justice all over the world. (Sermon 24.3)<sup>61</sup>

### **Genesis 37:26**

**And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?**

Jasher 41:24 And Joseph advanced to his brethren, and before he had come nigh unto them, they had resolved to slay him. 25 And Simeon said to his brethren, Behold the man of dreams is coming unto us this day, and now therefore come and let us kill him and cast him in one of the pits that are in the wilderness, and when his father shall seek him from us, we will say an evil beast has devoured him. 26 And Reuben heard the words of his brethren concerning Joseph, and he said unto them, You should not do this thing, for how can we look up to our father Jacob? Cast him into this pit to die there, but stretch not forth a hand upon him to spill his blood; and Reuben said this in order to deliver him from their hand, to bring him back to his father. 27 And when Joseph came to his brethren he sat before them, and they rose upon him and seized him and smote him to the earth, and stripped the coat of many colors which he had on. 28 And they took him and cast him into a pit, and in the pit there was no water, but serpents and scorpions. And Joseph was afraid of the serpents and scorpions that were in the pit. And Joseph cried out with a loud voice, and the Lord hid the serpents and scorpions in the sides of the pit, and

<sup>60</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>61</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

they did no harm unto Joseph. 29 And Joseph called out from the pit to his brethren, and said unto them, What have I done unto you, and in what have I sinned? why do you not fear the Lord concerning me? am I not of your bones and flesh, and is not Jacob your father, my father? why do you do this thing unto me this day, and how will you be able to look up to our father Jacob? 30 And he continued to cry out and call unto his brethren from the pit, and he said, O Judah, Simeon, and Levi, my brethren, lift me up from the place of darkness in which you have placed me, and come this day to have compassion on me, ye children of the Lord, and sons of Jacob my father. And if I have sinned unto you, are you not the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? if they saw an orphan they had compassion over him, or one that was hungry, they gave him bread to eat, or one that was thirsty, they gave him water to drink, or one that was naked, they covered him with garments! 31 And how then will you withhold your pity from your brother, for I am of your flesh and bones, and if I have sinned unto you, surely you will do this on account of my father! 32 And Joseph spoke these words from the pit, and his brethren could not listen to him, nor incline their ears to the words of Joseph, and Joseph was crying and weeping in the pit. 33 And Joseph said, O that my father knew, this day, the act which my brothers have done unto me, and the words which they have this day spoken unto me. 34 And all his brethren heard his cries and weeping in the pit, and his brethren went and removed themselves from the pit, so that they might not hear the cries of Joseph and his weeping in the pit.

## CHAPTER 42

1 And they went and sat on the opposite side, about the distance of a bow-shot, and they sat there to eat bread, and whilst they were eating, they held counsel together what was to be done with him, whether to slay him or to bring him back to his father. 2 They were holding the counsel, when they lifted up their eyes, and saw, and behold there was a company of Ishmaelites coming at a distance by the road of Gilead, going down to Egypt. 3 And Judah said unto them, What gain will it be to us if we slay our brother? peradventure God will require him from us; this then is the counsel proposed concerning him, which you shall do unto him: Behold this company of Ishmaelites going down to Egypt, 4 Now therefore, come let us dispose of him to them, and let not our hand be upon him, and they will lead him along with them, and he will be lost amongst the people of the land, and we will not put him to death with our own hands. And the proposal pleased his brethren and they did according to the word of Judah.<sup>62</sup>

### **Genesis 37:27**

**Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content.**

[sell him] Slaves were in great demand in Egypt.

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<sup>62</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

**[let not our hand be upon him]** They thought to ease their conscience, but responsibility for sin isn't so easily removed. God remembered and allowed these men to reap what they had sown (Genesis 42:1-45:15; Genesis 50:15-21).

**slave trade.** The slave trade existed from earliest times in the ancient Near East. Slaves were generally war captives or persons taken in raids. Traders often accepted slaves, whom they transported to new areas and sold. These persons seldom obtained their freedom.

The brothers were worried about bearing the guilt of Joseph's death. Judah suggested an option that was not right but would leave them guiltless of murder. Sometimes we jump at a solution because it is the lesser of two evils, but it still is not the right action to take. When someone proposes a seemingly workable solution, first ask, "Is it right?"<sup>63</sup>

It is Judah's advice that is ultimately heeded, reflecting the importance of this brother elsewhere in the Joseph story.<sup>64</sup>

Now Judah intervenes when he sees some traders going by. It is a very mercenary plan that he has, but at least he doesn't want murder to take place. He doesn't want the blood of Joseph to be on their hands. The brothers were satisfied with the suggestion because what they wanted was to get rid of him—they didn't care how it was accomplished. They realized the Ishmeelites would take him down to Egypt and would sell him there as a slave. At least they would be rid of him. Slavery in most places was a living death, and they knew they would certainly never hear from him again.<sup>65</sup>

### **Genesis 37:28**

**Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty *pieces* of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.**

**[pieces of silver]** The word pieces is in italics, so it's not clear what kind of money is referred to. Perhaps they were shekels of \$2.50 each. If so, 20 shekels or \$50 would be \$25 less than what Judas was paid for selling Christ. Compare this covetousness with Joseph's unselfishness in Genesis 42:25-35.

**Midianite/Ishmaelite.** The interchange of these two names in the story probably reflects a close affinity between the two groups. Some suggest that the Ishmaelites were considered a subtribe of the Midianites. Others suggest the Midianites simply purchased Joseph from the Ishmaelites. However, based on the intermingling of the names in Judges

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<sup>63</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>64</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>65</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:151). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

8:24, it would appear that the biblical writer either assumed they were related or is reflecting a known kin tie between them.<sup>66</sup>

Although Joseph's brothers didn't kill him outright, they wouldn't expect him to survive for long as a slave. They were quite willing to let cruel slave traders do their dirty work for them. Joseph faced a 30-day journey through the desert, probably chained and on foot. He would be treated like baggage, and once in Egypt, would be sold as a piece of merchandise. His brothers thought they would never see him again. But God was in control of Joseph's life.

In its current form, the text mentions both Ishmaelite caravaneers (v. 25) and Midianite traders, just as it mentions two different attempts to save Joseph's life, one by Reuben (vv. 21-22, 29-30) and one by Judah (vv. 26-28). Although arguments have been made that Midianites and Israelites are the same group (cf. Judg. 8:24), many modern scholars think the explanation lies in source analysis; Reuben and the Midianites derive from the E version of the story, and Judah and the Ishmaelites from the J version, though it is difficult to find complete J and E versions throughout the narrative. In the story in its current form, it is unclear who is the subject of pulled in v. 28 – the brothers or the Midianite traders. One could argue that if it is the latter, Joseph's brothers truly do not know what became of him. But the idea that it was the Midianites rather than the brothers who sold him to the Ishmaelites cannot explain the reports that it is the Midianites who bring him to Egypt (v. 36; cf. 39:1).<sup>67</sup>

Joseph's brothers readily sold him into bondage. By this deceit, the Israelites came to live in Egypt, enslaved in bondage for over 400 years (cf. 15:12-17). Joseph's brothers originally intended to kill him (v. 18), but they followed the suggestion of Reuben (vv. 22-24; cf. 42:22) and put him in a "pit" (v. 22; actually a "cistern," narrow at the top and wide at the bottom). Then they followed the advice of Judah and sold him into slavery (vv. 26, 27). The terms "Midianites" and "Ishmaelites" are virtually synonymous and are used interchangeably in vv. 25, 27, 28, 36, and in 39:1 (cf. Judg 8:22-24); a reasonable explanation is that these Ishmaelites lived in Midian.<sup>68</sup>

**Chrysostom:** "They were unconcerned that he was their brother"

What an unlawful contract! What baleful profit! What illicit sale! The one who caused the same birth pangs as yourselves, the one so dear to your father, the one who came to see you, who never did you the slightest wrong, you endeavored to sell – and sell to savage people traveling down to Egypt.

What unlawful frenzy! What dreadful malice! I mean, even if you did this out of fear of the dreams, convinced that they would certainly come to pass in every detail, why did you attempt the impossible and give evidence by what you did of your hostility toward God, who had foretold this to Joseph? If, on the contrary, you give no credence to the dreams but consider them nonsense, why did you do what brought you everlasting defilement and caused your father irreparable grief? But what excess of passion – or

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<sup>66</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>67</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>68</sup> Believer's Study Bible

rather, of a bloodthirsty intention! You see, when someone is obsessed with some improper exploit and becomes intoxicated with improper designs, he does not keep before him the unsleeping eye; he has no respect even for nature of anything else that could bring him to compassion. That was the situation with these men too. They were not concerned that he was their brother, that he was only a youth, that he was so dear to their father, that he had no experience of life in foreign parts or living in exile and yet was on the point of departing for such a land and living among savages. Instead, they abandoned every sane consideration and had one thing on their minds, allowing their envy to have (as they thought) an immediate effect. (*Homilies on Genesis 61:15-16*)<sup>69</sup>.

**McGee:** At this point you are probably thinking that Moses (who wrote the Genesis record) should make up his mind. First he calls them Ishmeelites, then Midianites, and then he calls them Ishmeelites again. So who are they? Is this an error in the Bible? Sometime ago a student brought to me a little booklet, which had been handed to him, listing a thousand or two thousand so-called errors in the Bible. After looking it over, the only errors I found were in that little book—not in the Bible. One of the so-called errors was this matter of calling the men of this caravan Ishmeelites, then Midianites, then Ishmeelites again.

This is an interesting point, and it deserves a closer look. First of all, it reveals how the critic and those who hate the Bible can interpret as an error something that actually shows the accuracy of the biblical record.

Who are the Ishmeelites? They are the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham. Who are the Midianites? They are the descendants of Midian, a son of Abraham. Ishmael was the son of Abraham by Hagar, and Midian was the son of Abraham by Keturah whom he married after the death of Sarah. They are all brethren—they are actually kin to this group of boys who are selling their brother! At this time, who was an Israelite? Well, there were only twelve of them. How many Ishmeelites do you think there might be by this time? Ishmael was older than Isaac, so maybe there were one hundred or more. How many Midianites would there be? Well, Midian was born after Isaac; so there couldn't be too many—maybe a dozen or more. These were little groups, and in that day travel was dangerous. They were going across the desert to Egypt. They joined together for protection, and they joined together for a common interest. They were going on a business trip to Egypt, and, since they were related, they understood each other and joined together.

May I say that the Word of God makes good sense if you just let it make good sense. We are the folk that don't make the good sense. Ignorance adds a great deal to what people consider contradictions in the Bible. You can see that Moses understood what the situation was, and he wrote precisely.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

<sup>70</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:151). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Genesis 37:29**

**And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he rent his clothes.**

**[returned unto the pit]** Reuben was away when Joseph was sold, so was not a party to this crime.

**[rent his clothes]** Showing his earnestness in trying to deliver Joseph.

### **Genesis 37:30**

**And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child *is* not; and I, whither shall I go?**

Reuben returned to the pit to find Joseph, but his little brother was gone. His first response, in effect, was “What is going to happen to me?” rather than “What is going to happen to Joseph?” In a tough situation, are you usually concerned first about yourself? Consider the person most affected by the problem, and you will be more likely to find a solution for it.

Reuben’s cry is strikingly similar to Rachel’s lament in Jer. 31:15.

### **Genesis 37:31**

**And they took Joseph’s coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood;**

**[took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood]**

Nothing is said as to what part Reuben played in this or how far he consented to covering up the crime.

**[dipped the coat in the blood]** They did not have CSI! Modern analysis would have proven that this wasn't human blood.

There is a certain poetic justice to the brothers’ cruel deception of their father, since Jacob had used kids to deceive his own father (27:5-23).

Scripture does not tell us whether they told Reuben what they actually had done, but I’m of the opinion they did. And they probably said it was no use chasing after the merchants because they were a long way off by now; so he might as well help them think up a good story to tell Jacob.

### **Genesis 37:32**

**And they sent the coat of *many* colours, and they brought *it* to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it *be* thy son's coat or no.**

**[they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father]** It appears the coat was sent by servants to Jacob, and later the sons came to comfort their father (Genesis 37:35).<sup>71</sup>

**Sent the coat of many colors—to their father**—What deliberate cruelty to torture the feelings of their aged father, and thus harrow up his soul!

**[thy son's coat or no]** Not our brother's, but thy son's coat. Sin always chooses a word least calculated to disturb the conscience.

**McGee:** Pretty clever, isn't it? They act as if they had never seen Joseph. They pretend they just found this coat. Believe me, they knew that hated coat! But they pretend they don't recognize it and ask their father whether he recognizes it. Jacob knew whose coat it was. He comes to a natural conclusion and, of course, the conclusion to which the brothers intended for him to come.<sup>72</sup>

### **Genesis 37:33**

**And he knew it, and said, *It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.***

They didn't say Joseph was torn by animals. This was Jacob's conclusion and they allowed their father to live in grief, deceived.

**Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces!**—It is likely he inferred this from the lacerated state of the coat, which, in order the better to cover their wickedness, they had not only besmeared with the blood of the goat, but it is probable reduced to tatters. And what must a father's heart have felt in such a case! As this coat is rent, so is the body of my beloved son rent in pieces! and Jacob rent his clothes.<sup>73</sup>

**they took Joseph's coat**—The commission of one sin necessarily leads to another to conceal it; and the scheme of deception which the sons of Jacob planned and practiced on their aged father was a necessary consequence of the atrocious crime they had perpetrated. What a wonder that their cruel sneer, "thy son's coat," and their forced efforts to comfort him, did not awaken suspicion! But extreme grief, like every other passion, is

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<sup>71</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>72</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:151). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>73</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

blind, and Jacob, great as his affliction was, did allow himself to indulge his sorrow more than became one who believed in the government of a supreme and all-wise Disposer.<sup>74</sup>

**McGee:** Let's pause and take another look at this. They killed a kid of the goats and used that blood on the coat. Does this matter of deceiving a father with a goat remind us of something we've heard before? Remember that when Rebekah and Jacob were conniving, they used a kid for the savory meat dish, and they took the skin of the goat and put it on the hands and arms of Jacob to deceive his father. Now the brothers of Joseph are using the blood of a goat to deceive their father, who is none other than Jacob himself. They hand the coat to him and say, "Do you recognize it? We just found it up there in the mountains. It looks like a wild beast must have got to him." Old Jacob came to the conclusion that his son Joseph had been killed.

Notice this very carefully. Jacob is deceived in exactly the same way that he had deceived. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7)—not something else, not something similar, but the *same thing*. This man Jacob did some bad sowing. He used deception, and now that he is a father, he is deceived in the identical way that he had deceived his own father years before.

When we sow corn, we reap corn. When we sow tares, we reap tares. We get exactly what we sow. This is true in any realm you wish to move in today. It is true in the physical realm, in the moral, and in the spiritual realm. That is true also for the believer. If you think you can get by with sin because you are a child of God, you have another thought coming. In fact, you'd better take that other thought and not commit the sin because God is no respecter of persons. He said this is the way it is going to be, and you are not an exception. I talked to a minister who had gotten involved with another man's wife. As I talked with him, he tried to justify himself on the basis that he was someone special to the Lord. He felt that because he was who he was, he could operate on a little different plane and by a different rule book than anyone else. But he found that God is no respecter of persons.<sup>75</sup>

### **Genesis 37:34**

**And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.**

Jacob was convinced that his favorite son was dead. Ironic retribution here: Jacob had deceived his own father Isaac using his brother's tunic, and the skins of a goat... (Gen 27:16).

**[rent his clothes]**

#### **Rending Clothes**

Ripping clothes is a chief sign of mourning in the East. It is customary to lay aside jewels and fine clothing and to be clothed in sackcloth while making loud wailing. See Joshua

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<sup>74</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>75</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:151). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

7:6; 1 Samuel 4:12; 2 Samuel 1:11; 2 Samuel 3:31; 2 Samuel 13:31; 2 Kings 2:12; 2 Kings 18:37; 2 Kings 19:1; Ezra 9:3; Job 1:20. The ceremony of rending clothes requires a knife. Cuts are first made on the right side of the upper garment for brother, sister, son, daughter, or wife, and on the left side for a father or mother. Other garments are cut likewise. Sackcloth is generally made of the hair of goats or camels, and is very coarse and black. The same material was used for straining liquids, and making sacks. Sackcloth could be worn either over or under the outer garments, or instead of them.

### **Twenty-eight Examples of Rending Clothes**

1. Reuben—Joseph missing (Genesis 37)
2. Jacob—over Joseph (Genesis 37:34)
3. Joshua—Spy report (Numbers 14:6)
4. Joshua—sin (Joshua 7:6)
5. Jephthah—vow (Judges 11:35)
6. Soldier—defeat (1 Samuel 4:12)
7. Samuel—Saul (1 Samuel 15:27)
8. Soldier—defeat (2 Samuel 1:2)
9. David and men—hearing of defeat (2 Samuel 1:11-12)
10. Tamar—defiled (2 Samuel 13:19)
11. David—death of Amnon (2 Samuel 13:31)
12. Hushai—over Absalom (2 Samuel 15:32)
13. Ahab—his doom (1 Kings 21:17-27)
14. Elisha—taking of Elijah (2 Kings 2:12)
15. Jehoram—bad news (2 Kings 5:7-8)
16. Jehoram—cannibalism (2 Kings 6:28-30)
17. Athaliah—her doom (2 Kings 11:14)
18. Eliakim and Shebna—bearing evil tidings to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:37)
19. Hezekiah—hearing tidings (2 Kings 19:1)
20. Josiah—hearing the law (2 Kings 22:11,19)
21. Ezra—Israel integrated (Ezra 9:3-5)
22. Mordecai—Jews doomed (Esther 4:1)
23. Job—death of children and destruction of wealth (Job 1:20)
24. Job's three friends—in pity (Job 2:12)
25. Israelites—judgment (Jeremiah 41:5)
26. High priests—supposed blasphemy by Jesus (Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63)
27. Apostles—when sacrifices were offered to them (Acts 14:14)
28. Magistrates—when Christianity was preached in Philippi (Acts 16:22)<sup>76</sup>

### **Genesis 37:35**

**And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.**

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<sup>76</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

“Grave”: *Sheol, not the grave*: the region of departed spirits; Greek: *hades*. He expects to meet Joseph there (Cf. Luke 16...).

**[all his sons]** How they could be so hypocritical and see their father grieved "many days" (Genesis 37:34) is hard to understand unless we take into account that sin and guilt seek to hide, and the pretense of innocence shielding selfishness manifest itself to the very last.

**[all his daughters]** Jacob was only recorded as having only one daughter, so this may have been his sons' wives. He may have had other daughters whose names were not recorded.

**All his sons and all his daughters**—He had only one daughter, Dinah; but his sons' wives may be here included. But what hypocrisy in his sons to attempt to comfort him concerning the death of a son who they knew was alive; and what cruelty to put their aged father to such torture, when, properly speaking, there was no ground for it!<sup>77</sup>

**[Thus his father wept for him]** Jacob was deceived by the blood of a kid, as he had deceived his father by the skin of a kid (Genesis 27:16).

**mourning practices.** Mourning practices generally included tearing one's robe, weeping, putting dust and ashes in the hair and wearing sackcloth. Sackcloth was made of goat or camel hair and was coarse and uncomfortable. In many cases the sackcloth was only a loin covering. The official period of mourning was thirty days but could continue for as long as the mourner chose to continue to grieve.

That Jacob refused to be comforted recalls what is said of Rachel in Jer. 31:15, in a lament for the lost members of the nation. See 37:30 n.<sup>78</sup>

### **Genesis 37:36**

**And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard.**

**[Midianites]** The words Midianites and Ishmaelites are used interchangeably in this passage, proving they were one people or lived in the same country and carried on business together (cp. Genesis 37:25,27,28,36; Genesis 39:1).

### **[Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's]**

#### **Potiphar—a Eunuch**

The Hebrew word *cariyc* (H-5631), a eunuch, comes from a verb, to castrate. This person was a valet of females' quarters and thus a minister of state, a chamberlain (Genesis 39:1; Genesis 40:2,7; 1 Samuel 8:15; 1 Kings 22:9; 2 Kings 8:6; 2 Kings 24:12-15; 2 Kings 25:19; 1 Chron. 28:1; 2 Chron. 18:8). It is translated "chamberlain" 13 times (2 Kings 23:11; Esther 1:10-15; Esther 2:3,14,15,21; Esther 4:4-5; Esther 6:2,14; Esther

<sup>77</sup> Adam Cleake's Commentary on the Old Testament

<sup>78</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

7:9) and "eunuch" 17 times (2 Kings 9:32; 2 Kings 20:18; Isaiah 39:7; Isaiah 56:3-4; Jeremiah 29:2; Jeremiah 34:19; Jeremiah 38:7; Jeremiah 41:16; Jeremiah 52:25; Daniel 1:3-18). This may explain the unfaithfulness of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:10-13). In the East many eunuchs had wives and even harems where they kept many women, but they bore no children.

**[captain of the guard]** In charge of police; chief of the butchers. It fit his duties. If a person offended one of the Eastern despotic rulers, it was the duty of such guards to destroy the offender without trial. Potiphar executed Pharaoh's will on all subjects of his displeasure.

**Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's**—The word *saris*, translated officer, signifies a eunuch; and lest any person should imagine that because this Potiphar had a wife, therefore it is absurd to suppose him to have been a eunuch, let such persons know that it is not uncommon in the east for eunuchs to have wives, nay, some of them have even a harem or seraglio where they keep many women, though it does not appear that they have any progeny; and probably discontent on this ground might have contributed as much to the unfaithfulness of Potiphar's wife, as that less principled motive through which it is commonly believed she acted.

**Captain of the guard** *sar kattabbachim*, chief of the butchers; a most appropriate name for the guards of an eastern despot. If a person offend one of the despotic eastern princes, the order to one of the life-guards is, Go and bring me his head; and this command is instantly obeyed, without judge, jury, or any form of law. Potiphar, we may therefore suppose, was captain of those guards whose business it was to take care of the royal person, and execute his sovereign will on all the objects of his displeasure. Reader, if thou hast the happiness to live under the British constitution, be thankful to God. Here, the will, the power, and utmost influence of the king, were he even so disposed, cannot deprive the meanest subject of his property, his liberty, or his life. All the solemn legal forms of justice must be consulted; the culprit, however accused, be heard by himself and his counsel; and in the end twelve honest, impartial men, chosen from among his fellows, shall decide on the validity of the evidence produced by the accuser. For the trial by jury, as well as for innumerable political blessings, may God make the inhabitants of Great Britain thankful!

Imagine the culture shock Joseph experienced upon arriving in Egypt. Joseph had lived as a nomad, traveling the countryside with his family, caring for sheep. Suddenly he was thrust into the world's most advanced civilization with great pyramids, beautiful homes, sophisticated people, and a new language. While Joseph saw Egypt's skill and intelligence at their best, he also saw the Egyptians' spiritual blindness. They worshiped countless gods related to every aspect of life.

**Torah Class:** Now, Rueben, the firstborn of Jacob and a son of Leah, intervened and suggested that they not kill Joseph by their own hands; rather, they should throw him in a pit.....with the idea being forwarded that Joseph would just starve to death in that pit and never be found. Now, the Bible tells us that Rueben's real intention was not to have

Joseph die, but to come back later and retrieve him after the brothers had left the area. Let's remember here that Rueben, Jacob's firstborn, was the one who attempted a coup against his father by sleeping with Bilah....thereby claiming his father's concubine as a prize.

Although the coup failed.... and apparently after both Rachel and Leah died, Jacob ignored the fact that Bilah was considered "ruined" by tradition, and married her anyway....Reuben was obviously still considered the top-dog among the brothers. So, it's kind of interesting that Rueben, who had the most to lose with his father's special preference for Joseph, would be the one who tried to intervene and come to Joseph's rescue. Besides, as the eldest brother, Rueben would have been held responsible for the actions of the group.....and he was in enough hot water as it was, because of the Bilah affair.

It might be interesting to note, here, that the pit was in fact an empty well....a cistern. Remember, the place where they were was called Dothan, two wells, and apparently one of those two wells was dry, for we are informed as much in V24. Dry wells and cisterns were commonly used as prison cells, even hiding places, in that day. So, Rueben's idea was hardly novel.

A couple of chapters ago, we got a pretty good glimpse as to the hardened individuals that these brothers were; that had slain all the males of Shechem after the men had been duped into being circumcised and were weakened by its aftereffects. Then, they went on a rampage to loot the helpless city, even carry off some of its women and children to use to increase their own families. So, it should be of little surprise that these same pitiless men would throw their teenage brother into an empty well to die, and then immediately sit down to have lunch as his pleas for mercy hung in the air!

No sooner had they begun to eat, than they spot a caravan of Ishmaelite, Arab, traders. With this, Judah, another son of Leah, has an idea: let's not allow him to die in the pit, let's SELL him to the Arabs, that way whatever happens to him from that point is beyond their control. What fractured logic. Besides, they can actually profit monetarily by getting rid of Joseph this way, so why not do it?

Incidentally, the idea that it would be such a great coincidence for these traders to come along, out in the middle of nowhere, is not at all farfetched. For one of the oldest trading routes of the Middle East ran from the spice producing region of Gilead, down through the area of Shechem (right where they were located), and then all the way into Egypt. So, the brothers sold Joseph to the traders for 20 shekels of silver, the going rate for a male slave. Rueben returns, finds Joseph is gone, and "tore his garment", a sign of mourning. Now, this is not so much because he laments that Joseph is gone, but as the eldest HE will be held responsible by his father, Jacob. The brothers now put blood on the royal tunic they had stripped from Joseph before they threw him in the well, and take it to their father, asking, "is this Joseph's tunic"? Of course Jacob immediately identified the tunic as Joseph's. The blood on the tunic was proof enough to Jacob that a wild animal had killed and eaten Joseph, such that the brothers didn't even have to tell their lie. Rather, they offered their father comfort.

But, Jacob couldn't be comforted and gives us a little hint of how people of his day viewed death. He says rhetorically, that surely HE shall now die, and then go down into Sheol to be with his son Joseph. At that time, Sheol basically meant the grave, or the place of the dead. The concept of dying and going to heaven did not exist. As we have

seen in recent chapters, there IS this concept of dying and “being gathered to your people”, a statement associated with the nearly universal practice of ancestor worship. Exactly what that meant to the mind of these ancients is unsure; but certainly it carries with it the idea of some type of life after death, even if they were unclear as to what that amounted to.

One little thing about this chapter that gives us a little trouble: it alternates between saying that the brothers sold Joseph to Ishmaelites, and to Midianites. Now, Ishmaelites were a different people than the Midianites. Ishmael was a son of Abraham, as was Midian. But, Ishmael’s mother was Hagar, while Midian’s was Keturah. Perhaps Ishmaelites had already become simply a general term for all the Semitic peoples living in the area of Arabia, and Midianites was more specific and precise identification. But, we’re just not sure.

In any case, in the last verse we see Joseph arrive in Egypt and get sold to a very high Egyptian government official: Potiphar. Potiphar is a rather common Egyptian name, and it is found on Egyptian monuments from several dynasties. Written Pet-Pa-Ra, it simply means “dedicated to Ra” or “a gift to Ra”; Ra was the Egyptian sun god. Now, it is often debated as to exactly what office Potiphar held for Pharaoh, but it for certain had something to do with the military. Whether he was captain of the palace guard, or in charge of all of Pharaoh’s armies, or simply the Pharaoh’s chief bodyguard isn’t fully clear. But, he was probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> most powerful man in Egypt.....for the moment, anyway.<sup>79</sup>

### **Clark Summery:**

1. WITH this chapter the history of Joseph commences, and sets before our eyes such a scene of wonders wrought by Divine Providence in such a variety of surprising instances, as cannot fail to confirm our faith in God, show the propriety of resignation to his will, and confidence in his dispensations, and prove that all things work together for good to them that love him. Joseph has often been considered as a type of Christ, and this subject in the hands of different persons has assumed a great variety of coloring. The following parallels appear the most probable; but I shall not pledge myself for the propriety of any of them: “Jesus Christ, prefigured by Joseph, the beloved of his father, and by him sent to visit his brethren, is the innocent person whom his brethren sold for a few pieces of silver, the bargain proposed by his brother Judah, (Greek Judas), the very namesake of that disciple and brother (for so Christ vouchsafes to call him) who sold his Lord and Master; and who by this means became their Lord and Savior; nay, the Savior of strangers, and of the whole world; which had not happened but for this plot of destroying him, the act of rejecting, and exposing him to sale. In both examples we find the same fortune and the same innocence: Joseph in the prison between two criminals; Jesus on the cross between two thieves. Joseph foretells deliverance to one of his companions and death to the other, from the same omens: of the two thieves, one reviles Christ, and perishes in his crimes; the other believes, and is assured of a speedy entrance into paradise. Joseph requests the person that should

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<sup>79</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

be delivered to be mindful of him in his glory; the person saved by Jesus Christ entreats his deliverer to remember him when he came into his kingdom.”—See Pascal’s Thoughts. Parallels and coincidences of this kind should always be received cautiously, for where the Spirit of God has not marked a direct resemblance, and obviously referred to it as such in some other part of his word, it is bold, if not dangerous, to say “such and such things and persons are types of Christ.” We have instances sufficiently numerous, legitimately attested, without having recourse to those which are of dubious import and precarious application. See the observation on Genesis 40. (Genesis 40:23 (note)).

2. Envy has been defined, “pain felt, and malignity conceived, at the sight of excellence or happiness in another.” Under this detestable passion did the brethren of Joseph labor; and had not God particularly interposed, it would have destroyed both its subjects and its object, Perhaps there is no vice which so directly filiates itself on Satan, as this does. In opposition to the assertion that we cannot envy that by which we profit, it may be safely replied that we may envy our neighbor’s wisdom, though he gives us good counsel; his riches, though he supplies our wants; and his greatness, though he employs it for our protection.
3. How ruinous are family distractions! A house divided against itself cannot stand. Parents should take good heed that their own conduct be not the first and most powerful cause of such dissensions, by exciting envy in some of their children through undue partiality to others; but it is in vain to speak to most parents on the subject; they will give way to foolish predilections, till, in the prevailing distractions of their families, they meet with the punishment of their imprudence, when regrets are vain, and the evil past remedy.<sup>80</sup>

## **Book of Jasher Chapters 42-44**

### CHAPTER 42

5 And whilst they were discoursing about this matter, and before the company of Ishmaelites had come up to them, seven trading men of Midian passed by them, and as they passed they were thirsty, and they lifted up their eyes and saw the pit in which Joseph was immured, and they looked, and behold every species of bird was upon him. 6 And these Midianites ran to the pit to drink water, for they thought that it contained water, and on coming before the pit they heard the voice of Joseph crying and weeping in the pit, and they looked down into the pit, and they saw and behold there was a youth of comely appearance and well favored. 7 And they called unto him and said, Who art thou and who brought thee hither, and who placed thee in this pit, in the wilderness? and they all assisted to raise up Joseph and they drew him out, and brought him up from the pit, and took him and went away on their journey and passed by his brethren. 8 And these said unto them, Why do you do this, to take our servant from us and to go away? surely we placed this youth in the pit because he rebelled against us, and you come and bring him up and lead him away; now then give us back our servant. 9 And the Midianites answered and said unto the sons of Jacob, Is this your servant, or does this man attend you? peradventure you are all his servants, for he is more comely and well favored than any of you, and why do you all speak falsely unto us? 10 Now therefore we will not

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<sup>80</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

listen to your words, nor attend to you, for we found the youth in the pit in the wilderness, and we took him; we will therefore go on. 11 And all the sons of Jacob approached them and rose up to them and said unto them, Give us back our servant, and why will you all die by the edge of the sword? And the Midianites cried out against them, and they drew their swords, and approached to fight with the sons of Jacob. 12 And behold Simeon rose up from his seat against them, and sprang upon the ground and drew his sword and approached the Midianites and he gave a terrible shout before them, so that his shouting was heard at a distance, and the earth shook at Simeon's shouting. 13 And the Midianites were terrified on account of Simeon and the noise of his shouting, and they fell upon their faces, and were excessively alarmed. 14 And Simeon said unto them, Verily I am Simeon, the son of Jacob the Hebrew, who have, only with my brother, destroyed the city of Shechem and the cities of the Amorites; so shall God moreover do unto me, that if all your brethren the people of Midian, and also the kings of Canaan, were to come with you, they could not fight against me. 15 Now therefore give us back the youth whom you have taken, lest I give your flesh to the birds of the skies and the beasts of the earth. 16 And the Midianites were more afraid of Simeon, and they approached the sons of Jacob with terror and fright, and with pathetic words, saying, 17 Surely you have said that the young man is your servant, and that he rebelled against you, and therefore you placed him in the pit; what then will you do with a servant who rebels against his master? Now therefore sell him unto us, and we will give you all that you require for him; and the Lord was pleased to do this in order that the sons of Jacob should not slay their brother. 18 And the Midianites saw that Joseph was of a comely appearance and well-favored; they desired him in their hearts and were urgent to purchase him from his brethren. 19 And the sons of Jacob hearkened to the Midianites and they sold their brother Joseph to them for twenty pieces of silver, and Reuben their brother was not with them, and the Midianites took Joseph and continued their journey to Gilead. 20 They were going along the road, and the Midianites repented of what they had done, in having purchased the young man, and one said to the other, What is this thing that we have done, in taking this youth from the Hebrews, who is of comely appearance and well favored. 21 Perhaps this youth is stolen from the land of the Hebrews, and why then have we done this thing? and if he should be sought for and found in our hands we shall die through him. 22 Now surely hardy and powerful men have sold him to us, the strength of one of whom you saw this day; perhaps they stole him from his land with their might and with their powerful arm, and have therefore sold him to us for the small value which we gave unto them. 23 And whilst they were thus discoursing together, they looked, and behold the company of Ishmaelites which was coming at first, and which the sons of Jacob saw, was advancing toward the Midianites, and the Midianites said to each other, Come let us sell this youth to the company of Ishmaelites who are coming toward us, and we will take for him the little that we gave for him, and we will be delivered from his evil. 24 And they did so, and they reached the Ishmaelites, and the Midianites sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver which they had given for him to his brethren. 25 And the Midianites went on their road to Gilead, and the Ishmaelites took Joseph and they let him ride upon one of the camels, and they were leading him to Egypt. 26 And Joseph heard that the Ishmaelites were proceeding to Egypt, and Joseph lamented and wept at this thing that he was to be so far removed from the land of Canaan, from his father, and he wept bitterly whilst he was riding upon the camel, and one of their men

observed him, and made him go down from the camel and walk on foot, and notwithstanding this Joseph continued to cry and weep, and he said, O my father, my father. 27 And one of the Ishmaelites rose up and smote Joseph upon the cheek, and still he continued to weep; and Joseph was fatigued in the road, and was unable to proceed on account of the bitterness of his soul, and they all smote him and afflicted him in the road, and they terrified him in order that he might cease from weeping. 28 And the Lord saw the ambition of Joseph and his trouble, and the Lord brought down upon those men darkness and confusion, and the hand of every one that smote him became withered. 29 And they said to each other, What is this thing that God has done to us in the road? and they knew not that this befell them on account of Joseph. And the men proceeded on the road, and they passed along the road of Ephrath where Rachel was buried. 30 And Joseph reached his mother's grave, and Joseph hastened and ran to his mother's grave, and fell upon the grave and wept.

31 And Joseph cried aloud upon his mother's grave, and he said, O my mother, my mother, O thou who didst give me birth, awake now, and rise and see thy son, how he has been sold for a slave, and no one to pity him. 32 O rise and see thy son, weep with me on account of my troubles, and see the heart of my brethren. 33 Arouse my mother, arouse, awake from thy sleep for me, and direct thy battles against my brethren. O how have they stripped me of my coat, and sold me already twice for a slave, and separated me from my father, and there is no one to pity me. 34 Arouse and lay thy cause against them before God, and see whom God will justify in the judgment, and whom he will condemn.

35 Rise, O my mother, rise, awake from thy sleep and see my father how his soul is with me this day, and comfort him and ease his heart. 36 And Joseph continued to speak these words, and Joseph cried aloud and wept bitterly upon his mother's grave; and he ceased speaking, and from bitterness of heart he became still as a stone upon the grave.

37 And Joseph heard a voice speaking to him from beneath the ground, which answered him with bitterness of heart, and with a voice of weeping and praying in these words:

38 My son, my son Joseph, I have heard the voice of thy weeping and the voice of thy lamentation; I have seen thy tears; I know thy troubles, my son, and it grieves me for thy sake, and abundant grief is added to my grief. 39 Now therefore my son, Joseph my son, hope to the Lord, and wait for him and do not fear, for the Lord is with thee, he will deliver thee from all trouble. 40 Rise my son, go down unto Egypt with thy masters, and do not fear, for the Lord is with thee, my son. And she continued to speak like unto these words unto Joseph, and she was still. 41 And Joseph heard this, and he wondered greatly at this, and he continued to weep; and after this one of the Ishmaelites observed him crying and weeping upon the grave, and his anger was kindled against him, and he drove him from there, and he smote him and cursed him. 42 And Joseph said unto the men, May I find grace in your sight to take me back to my father's house, and he will give you abundance of riches. 43 And they answered him, saying, Art thou not a slave, and where is thy father? and if thou hadst a father thou wouldst not already twice have been sold for a slave for so little value; and their anger was still roused against him, and they continued to smite him and to chastise him, and Joseph wept bitterly. 44 And the Lord saw Joseph's affliction, and Lord again smote these men, and chastised them, and the Lord caused darkness to envelope them upon the earth, and the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, and the earth shook at the voice of the thunder and of the mighty wind, and the men were terrified and knew not where they should go. 45 And the beasts and camels

stood still, and they led them, but they would not go, they smote them, and they crouched upon the ground; and the men said to each other, What is this that God has done to us? what are our transgressions, and what are our sins that this thing has thus befallen us? 46 And one of them answered and said unto them, Perhaps on account of the sin of afflicting this slave has this thing happened this day to us; now therefore implore him strongly to forgive us, and then we shall know on whose account this evil befalleth us, and if God shall have compassion over us, then we shall know that all this cometh to us on account of the sin of afflicting this slave. 47 And the men did so, and they supplicated Joseph and pressed him to forgive them; and they said, We have sinned to the Lord and to thee, now therefore vouchsafe to request of thy God that he shall put away this death from amongst us, for we have sinned to him. 48 And Joseph did according to their words, and the Lord hearkened to Joseph, and the Lord put away the plague which he had inflicted upon those men on account of Joseph, and the beasts rose up from the ground and they conducted them, and they went on, and the raging storm abated and the earth became tranquilized, and the men proceeded on their journey to go down to Egypt, and the men knew that this evil had befallen them on account of Joseph. 49 And they said to each other, Behold we know that it was on account of his affliction that this evil befell us; now therefore why shall we bring this death upon our souls? Let us hold counsel what to do to this slave. 50 And one answered and said, Surely he told us to bring him back to his father; now therefore come, let us take him back and we will go to the place that he will tell us, and take from his family the price that we gave for him and we will then go away. 51 And one answered again and said, Behold this counsel is very good, but we cannot do so for the way is very far from us, and we cannot go out of our road. 52 And one more answered and said unto them, This is the counsel to be adopted, we will not swerve from it; behold we are this day going to Egypt, and when we shall have come to Egypt, we will sell him there at a high price, and we will be delivered from his evil. 53 And this thing pleased the men and they did so, and they continued their journey to Egypt with Joseph.

#### CHAPTER 43

1 And when the sons of Jacob had sold their brother Joseph to the Midianites, their hearts were smitten on account of him, and they repented of their acts, and they sought for him to bring him back, but could not find him. 2 And Reuben returned to the pit in which Joseph had been put, in order to lift him out, and restore him to his father, and Reuben stood by the pit, and he heard not a word, and he called out Joseph! Joseph! and no one answered or uttered a word. 3 And Reuben said, Joseph has died through fright, or some serpent has caused his death; and Reuben descended into the pit, and he searched for Joseph and could not find him in the pit, and he came out again. 4 And Reuben tore his garments and he said, The child is not there, and how shall I reconcile my father about him if he be dead? and he went to his brethren and found them grieving on account of Joseph, and counseling together how to reconcile their father about him, and Reuben said unto his brethren, I came to the pit and behold Joseph was not there, what then shall we say unto our father, for my father will only seek the lad from me. 5 And his brethren answered him saying, Thus and thus we did, and our hearts afterward smote us on account of this act, and we now sit to seek a pretext how we shall reconcile our father to

it. 6 And Reuben said unto them, What is this you have done to bring down the grey hairs of our father in sorrow to the grave? the thing is not good, that you have done. 7 And Reuben sat with them, and they all rose up and swore to each other not to tell this thing unto Jacob, and they all said, The man who will tell this to our father or his household, or who will report this to any of the children of the land, we will all rise up against him and slay him with the sword. 8 And the sons of Jacob feared each other in this matter, from the youngest to the oldest, and no one spoke a word, and they concealed the thing in their hearts. 9 And they afterward sat down to determine and invent something to say unto their father Jacob concerning all these things. 10 And Issachar said unto them, Here is an advice for you if it seem good in your eyes to do this thing, take the coat which belongeth to Joseph and tear it, and kill a kid of the goats and dip it in its blood. 11 And send it to our father and when he seeth it he will say an evil beast has devoured him, therefore tear ye his coat and behold his blood will be upon his coat, and by your doing this we shall be free of our father's murmurings. 12 And Issachar's advice pleased them, and they hearkened unto him and they did according to the word of Issachar which he had counselled them. 13 And they hastened and took Joseph's coat and tore it, and they killed a kid of the goats and dipped the coat in the blood of the kid, and then trampled it in the dust, and they sent the coat to their father Jacob by the hand of Naphtali, and they commanded him to say these words: 14 We had gathered in the cattle and had come as far as the road to Shechem and farther, when we found this coat upon the road in the wilderness dipped in blood and in dust; now therefore know whether it be thy son's coat or not. 15 And Naphtali went and he came unto his father and he gave him the coat, and he spoke unto him all the words which his brethren had commanded him. 16 And Jacob saw Joseph's coat and he knew it and he fell upon his face to the ground, and became as still as a stone, and he afterward rose up and cried out with a loud and weeping voice and he said, It is the coat of my son Joseph! 17 And Jacob hastened and sent one of his servants to his sons, who went to them and found them coming along the road with the flock. 18 And the sons of Jacob came to their father about evening, and behold their garments were torn and dust was upon their heads, and they found their father crying out and weeping with a loud voice. 19 And Jacob said unto his sons, Tell me truly what evil have you this day suddenly brought upon me? and they answered their father Jacob, saying, We were coming along this day after the flock had been gathered in, and we came as far as the city of Shechem by the road in the wilderness, and we found this coat filled with blood upon the ground, and we knew it and we sent unto thee if thou couldst know it. 20 And Jacob heard the words of his sons and he cried out with a loud voice, and he said, It is the coat of my son, an evil beast has devoured him; Joseph is rent in pieces, for I sent him this day to see whether it was well with you and well with the flocks and to bring me word again from you, and he went as I commanded him, and this has happened to him this day whilst I thought my son was with you. 21 And the sons of Jacob answered and said, He did not come to us, neither have we seen him from the time of our going out from thee until now. 22 And when Jacob heard their words he again cried out aloud, and he rose up and tore his garments, and he put sackcloth upon his loins, and he wept bitterly and he mourned and lifted up his voice in weeping and exclaimed and said these words, 23 Joseph my son, O my son Joseph, I sent thee this day after the welfare of thy brethren, and behold thou hast been torn in pieces; through my hand has this happened to my son. 24 It grieves me for thee Joseph my son, it grieves me for thee;

how sweet wast thou to me during life, and now how exceedingly bitter is thy death to me. 25 O that I had died in thy stead Joseph my son, for it grieves me sadly for thee my son, O my son, my son. Joseph my son, where art thou, and where hast thou been drawn? arouse, arouse from thy place, and come and see my grief for thee, O my son Joseph.

26 Come now and number the tears gushing from my eyes down my cheeks, and bring them up before the Lord, that his anger may turn from me. 27 O Joseph my son, how didst thou fall, by the hand of one by whom no one had fallen from the beginning of the world unto this day; for thou hast been put to death by the smiting of an enemy, inflicted with cruelty, but surely I know that this has happened to thee, on account of the multitude of my sins. 28 Arouse now and see how bitter is my trouble for thee my son, although I did not rear thee, nor fashion thee, nor give thee breath and soul, but it was God who formed thee and built thy bones and covered them with flesh, and breathed in thy nostrils the breath of life, and then he gave thee unto me. 29 Now truly God who gave thee unto me, he has taken thee from me, and such then has befallen thee

30 And Jacob continued to speak like unto these words concerning Joseph, and he wept bitterly; he fell to the ground and became still. 31 And all the sons of Jacob seeing their father's trouble, they repented of what they had done, and they also wept bitterly. 32 And Judah rose up and lifted his father's head from the ground, and placed it upon his lap, and he wiped his father's tears from his cheeks, and Judah wept an exceeding great weeping, whilst his father's head was reclining upon his lap, still as a stone. 33 And the sons of Jacob saw their father's trouble, and they lifted up their voices and continued to weep, and Jacob was yet lying upon the ground still as a stone. 34 And all his sons and his servants and his servant's children rose up and stood round him to comfort him, and he refused to be comforted. 35 And the whole household of Jacob rose up and mourned a great mourning on account of Joseph and their father's trouble, and the intelligence reached Isaac, the son of Abraham, the father of Jacob, and he wept bitterly on account of Joseph, he and all his household, and he went from the place where he dwelt in Hebron, and his men with him, and he comforted Jacob his son, and he refused to be comforted.

36 And after this, Jacob rose up from the ground, and his tears were running down his cheeks, and he said unto his sons, Rise up and take your swords and your bows, and go forth into the field, and seek whether you can find my son's body and bring it unto me that I may bury it. 37 Seek also, I pray you, among the beasts and hunt them, and that which shall come the first before you seize and bring it unto me, perhaps the Lord will this day pity my affliction, and prepare before you that which did tear my son in pieces, and bring it unto me, and I will avenge the cause of my son. 38 And his sons did as their father had commanded them, and they rose up early in the morning, and each took his sword and his bow in his hand, and they went forth into the field to hunt the beasts.

39 And Jacob was still crying aloud and weeping and walking to and fro in the house, and smiting his hands together, saying, Joseph my son, Joseph my son. 40 And the sons of Jacob went into the wilderness to seize the beasts, and behold a wolf came toward them, and they seized him, and brought him unto their father, and they said unto him, This is the first we have found, and we have brought him unto thee as thou didst command us, and thy son's body we could not find. 41 And Jacob took the beast from the hands of his sons, and he cried out with a loud and weeping voice, holding the beast in his hand, and he spoke with a bitter heart unto the beast, Why didst thou devour my son Joseph, and how didst thou have no fear of the God of the earth, or of my trouble for my son Joseph?

42 And thou didst devour my son for naught, because he committed no violence, and didst thereby render me culpable on his account, therefore God will require him that is persecuted. 43 And the Lord opened the mouth of the beast in order to comfort Jacob with its words, and it answered Jacob and spoke these words unto him, 44 As God liveth who created us in the earth, and as thy soul liveth, my lord, I did not see thy son, neither did I tear him to pieces, but from a distant land I also came to seek my son who went from me this day, and I know not whether he be living or dead. 45 And I came this day into the field to seek my son, and your sons found me, and seized me and increased my grief, and have this day brought me before thee, and I have now spoken all my words to thee. 46 And now therefore, O son of man, I am in thy hands, and do unto me this day as it may seem good in thy sight, but by the life of God who created me, I did not see thy son, nor did I tear him to pieces, neither has the flesh of man entered my mouth all the days of my life. 47 And when Jacob heard the words of the beast he was greatly astonished, and sent forth the beast from his hand, and she went her way. 48 And Jacob was still crying aloud and weeping for Joseph day after day, and he mourned for his son many days.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT